

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



THE IN TIMES OF TROUBLE ISSUE
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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.

A passing shower, or a deluge that stays around? Some things outdoors stay put and get soaked, others float away. We shall brave through it all in our tinpot studio, with a push broom to keep the patio clear, and we’ll drag away the fallen branch or two from the mossy leaf-strewn gravel path that is our way in, just below the Sullivan Trail summit.

Bert, Beverly, and Fred have carpoled north and we’re in the Mud Room with Costa Rican coffee and pastries from the Poor Cousins Bakery. Fred has worked the rickety old sound board through its squawks and hums and he’s piping in the Serenade Number 2 of Brahms. Fred calls out, “The fifth movement is called Rondo! Can’t go wrong with that!”

The Dusty Courier Pouch is looking forlorn these days. We'll pluck some notes from the Archives and turn to our favorite BBC to look at the life and work of T.S. Eliot, who was quite at home with a microphone. Beverly is tapping her clipboard as she watches the clock sweep towards network feed. We scurry into the studio as Fred fades the Rondo.

ON THE AIR

Hello, everyone, and welcome to the broadcast! Today we'll find some GRTR "repeats"; then we'll be listening and learning about life, poetry, and radio, focusing on "The Waste Land" from 1922 and its various rhythms and interpretations.

First, though, we must congratulate the Club's Road Show Players for their performance at the recent MANC convention in Hunt Valley. They shook off the bonds of ZOOM and took to the stage, to read a "Lone Ranger" script written by the late Jack French. Our webpage photos show the full-range of the effort: characters in costume, the old step-up-step-back method at the microphones, the SFX table, and the sound board. Colorful, for sure, loud enough in the cavernous auditorium, and enjoyed by all.

Before we move on, we've got to stick to the Club website. Shouldn't everybody? Back to Zoom for Karl Schadow's presentation on "Weird Tales," and November, where John Abbott has assembled a "virtual reading" of characters for a first-time script called "The Double Eye."

In keeping with our archival bent, let's take a cue from the MANC photos. There, intent in his task as director is Rob Farr. He has been a staple of the Club and the metro-DC community for years. His work for Arlington County media is well-documented, as was his hard work at bringing the Slapsticon Film Convention to the area. Community interest, for sure.

I recall one sweltering summer's afternoon when I attended a session of vintage silent films presented in a modern office building in Roslyn, not far from the Tom Sarris Steak House. Wonderful.

And, on to our Archives about the Club Players. The "Signature Moments" GRTR issue of January 2019 features an essay about the exploits of the Club Players in their most prolific era. Rob Farr's essay made the cut. Here it is, to be read by Beverly as she steps to the microphone:

BEVERLY:

Thanks, Mark. Those were indeed halcyon days of collaboration of people and techniques, in venues across the area. I'm happy to read. Here's what Rob wrote:

The Club's Road Show Troupe scored another triumph with an encore performance of full-tilt script presentations at the Packard Theater in the Library of Congress facility in Culpeper Virginia on April 16th... It proves once again the treasures that can be found in small town Virginia. Over the years, the Metropolitan Old-Time Radio Club has performed live, Golden Age radio recreations for audiences as varied as senior citizens to seasoned attendees of OTR conventions. But perhaps no venue has been so high-profile as the Library of Congress Packard Theater in Culpeper Virginia. Culpeper is the site of the National Audio-Visual Conservation Center, where the nation's visual and sound heritage is archived in former civil defense vaults built deep into Pony Mountain.

Led by long-time member Michael Hayde, on April 16 the Club made its second appearance at the Packard Theater, the previous outing occurring in 2015 with recreations of *Dagnet* and *My Favorite Husband*. Last month's performance was the first time the program was augmented with live organ accompaniment provided by Ben Model, who usually accompanies silent films at the New York's Museum of Modern Art, McLean's Alden Theater and the Library of Congress. The organ at the Packard is a rich and flexible instrument capable of sound effects from church bells to train whistles.

The sold-out house witnessed live performances of *John's Other Wife* (soap opera), *Little Orphan Annie* (juvenile adventure) and *Pat Novak for Hire* (crime drama). The bill of fare was chosen to introduce a selection of genres to an audience unfamiliar with old-time radio. Even attendees who occasionally listen to WAMU's *Big Broadcast* were treated to an authentic demonstration of how Golden-Age radio broadcasts actually worked, complete with director's cues, cast members deftly shuttling back-and-forth before microphones, and sound effects created with tools such as coconut shells, aluminum sheets and rain sticks. For those effects

that could not be reproduced on stage, pre-recorded sound was used; yet even this was authentic to the era as practical effects were often augmented by sounds played back from disc or, by the 1950's, tape. Each program had its own unique set of sound patterns, requiring a crew of five ably led by Mark and Marsha Bush. The ensemble cast, many of whom have been performing in club recreations for years, delighted the audience with costumes appropriate to their characters. For example, actress Wendy Wilmer had three costume changes as she transformed from a 5-year-old girl to Little Orphan Annie to a sultry *femme fatale*! During the costume changes, Ben Model serenaded the audience with music that might have been heard by a studio audience of the era. The audience was also treated to a talk by the curator of the sound division about the Library's extensive collection of wire recordings and transcription discs.

As an added bonus, a secret message was included in the program along with a photograph of Little Orphan Annie's 1936 decoder badge and a pencil. Several in the cast later remarked how amazing it was to see 200 modern-day audience members assiduously writing down their numbers to decode Annie's four-word message. For members of the MWOTRC who couldn't make it to Culpeper, plans are afoot to perform the same slate of programs before a Washington audience in the Jefferson building of the Library of Congress. Stay tuned for more information!

MUSIC BRIDGE AND COMMERCIAL BREAK

Beverly has grabbed her clipboard and wiped her brow as she eyes the clock. Network feed, handled with aplomb by Fred, who pipes in the timeless favorite of ours, "So Many Stars," by Sergio Mendez and his ensemble, with the wonderful Sarah Vaughan on vocals.

Our own Dayton Dragons, at Developmental Level in the Cincinnati Reds minor leagues, are holding their own in the .500 range of wins and losses and proving their worth as a team where the parent team sends the occasional player for injury rehab assignment. The Reds aren't in the playoffs race, but anyhow their

young player Elly De La Cruz is still fast on the bases, and the team morale remains high, drawing in the crowds to see the fun and hope for runs! The Dragons hold forth in the community with events such as Heart Healthy Walks, Our Famous Recycling Bin, Honoring Dayton, and the Dragon Kids Club.

CARING FOR RADIO PLAYS

There is a beauty in language; it can be read but is clearly best when it is spoken. King James I of England gave a commission to his best scholars in 1604 to write a new translation of the Bible that would resonate from the highest pulpit to the ploughboy in the field. Four hundred years later the BBC came along. Their first broadcast was in 1922.

T.S. Eliot was hardly the first in line to get a job in the studio. He was a poet; he knew language and was fascinated by the idea of script readings. His most recent poem had been published in 1922. However, if the BBC were looking for material, Eliot's would not have made it through the door. The producer who read it would have said, "...a bit of all right..." and in his arch reasoning would have told Eliot that it could use a better title. No matter that "He Do the Police in Different Voices" was a line from a Dickens novel in which a salon lady so enjoyed having the newspaper read to her, of an afternoon.

That idea of presenting Eliot's glimpses of people talking in the midst of rivers and pubs, bedsits and city streets, is the subject of a 2022 BBC audio-documentary among scholars: 59-minutes with SFX and readings and audio clips, called nicely, "We Do the Waste Land in Different Voices."

We may listen, compare, and find a similar approach to another BBC program centered around W.H. Auden and the immediacy of his poem "September 1, 1939." Our GRTR ("Cityscapes", Nov. 11, 2020) details the scholars speaking, readings of the poem, and the frightful SFX as the comparison is made from the German invasion of Poland to the events of 9/11/2001.

The historical settings and narrative style of these poems are well-known. Auden writes: "Defenseless under the night / Our world in stupor lies." And he worries also for the future of the city, full of "dense commuters" working in "authoritarian skyscrapers."

Some of Eliot's lines are memorable, in others, the pastoral fades:

"...yet there the nightingale / Filled all the desert with inviolable voice /
And still she cried and still the world pursues, / Jug Jug to dirty ears."

One of the BBC scholars says, "...poetry is a clear expression of mixed feelings." Words for a poor newsboy to live by.

The interest in Eliot here is the rhythm of the immediate lines and the SFX and clips of the world in chaos beyond. The overlying constant sound is the wind. Bird song and water rushing are quick beside the ticking of a clock. There's the

clip-clop of horses' hooves and screeching organ music almost obscuring a tenor's lovely aria as our narrator awakes and walks in the "Unreal City/Under the brown fog of a winter dawn,/A crowd flowed over London Bridge, so many/I had not thought death has undone so many." (lines 60-63)

And then the voices begin in earnest, competing with the tolling of church bells, a row house gramophone, and Eliot's sing-song nonsense while walking along the Brown God Thames: "Weialala leia/Wallala leialala/Elizabeth and Leicester...". (275ff). Water and its sounds, the fishermen and the rats are key to the city view; the SFX of shrill orchestral horns give way to wind and thunder, leading to: "He passed the stages of his age and youth/Entering the whirlpool." (317-318).

A crisis has arisen as Part Five: "What the Thunder Said" proceeds. There is no water, or only rocks and a boy asking, "Who is the third who walks always beside you?...Who are the hooded hordes swarming/Over endless plains, stumbling in cracked earth/Ringed by the flat horizon only..." (360,369-371).

The SFX gear up from here on, as well. Wind and thunder now include police sirens and the roar of airplanes. In juxtaposition, two radio clips of disasters, 23 years apart. Radio announcer, in static: "Here is a flash from the Associated Press, dateline Dallas..." 1963. The sound of bombs and a radio commentary about "...towers...royal...Coventry..." signaling, we assume, the account of the German bombing of British cities in 1940.

Eliot had written in 1922: "Cracks and reforms and bursts in the violet air/Falling towers/Jerusalem Athens Alexandria/Vienna London/Unreal" (373-377).

There is a connection between this BBC program and two other great writers who wrote about the early, violent days of World War II. Norman Corwin wrote a radio play for the Columbia Workshop, and Janet Flanner filed a story for *The New Yorker* in 1939.

Here, from the GRTR, 11/11/2020:

Bert steps to the microphone and reads:

Roosevelt's neutrality in those early days did not go unnoticed; and people were asking, "Will the *Athenia* become like the *Lusitania*? Will the Americans come in?"

Much the way Norman Corwin describes the airfield in his "They Fly Through the Air," as a meadow where just before dawn birdsong gives way to men scurrying about and the throaty rumble of engines, so Janet Flanner concludes her letter: "Never have nights been more beautiful than these nights of anxiety. In the sky have

been shining in trinity the moon, Venus, and Mars. Nature has been more splendid than man.”



BBC fair use/ Hattie Morahan, Blake Ritson, T.S. Eliot

Eliot clearly was writing about places and the people around him. Those years were also stressful for him personally because he was having trouble fitting into the British way-of life. We can see bits of that discomfort in the early lines of the poem. A 90-minute radio play called “Tom and Viv” was written by Michael Hastings and broadcast on BBC Radio 4 in 2008.

Eliot married an intelligent, well-to-do young lady who was impulsive, vulgar, and needy. It was a mismatch. Her mother protected Viv as best she could. Her brother Maurice encouraged Viv with banter. They would berate each other with “Squelch!” And Tom became so distracted that he had no time for writing and he needed a job. His father-in-law got him a job at Lloyds, and Tom soon asked for time off because of his depression and his desire to write. We must assume that the playwright Hastings got most of the feelings and family situations right. And much of the tension shows up in Eliot’s “Waste Land” fragments of conversation among couples and neighbors.

This may well be Viv’s voice in the pub: “Why do you never speak? Speak./What are you thinking of? What thinking? What?...What shall I do now?/I shall rush out as I am and walk the street/With my hair down, so./What shall we do tomorrow? What shall we ever do?” (111-114,131-134).

Eliot’s voice is heard in the character’s: “O O O O that Shakespeherian Rag/It’s so elegant/So intelligent...” (128-130).

Eliot himself worked at Lloyd’s early in his writing career, so it is perhaps his own view-of-self when he writes: “A small house agent’s clerk, with one bold stare/One of the low on whom assurance sits/As a silk hat on a Bradford millionaire.” (232-234)

In the play, Tom manages to distance himself from Viv and make some progress for himself in the academic world. He gives Viv money from her family's trust, just enough for her to go to Selfridge's. "They know her there." And Tom manages to find analysis for Viv and a place in an institution. All the while Viv can name the dreadful mix of medications she has to take, all the while saying how much she loves Tom. She shrieks at her doctor: "I gave him the title "The Waste Land"! Hastings could not have made these thing up.

The play continues, we may assume, well-researched. Eliot didn't visit Viv at her institution for the last long years of her life. Maurice did visit her and they talked about his own misadventures, and they laughed together. They ended up crying bitterly together. Soulful string SFX carry out the scene.

In the play Eliot attended Viv's funeral (1947) but only late. Viv's caregiver tells us, in direct address, that Eliot approached the gravesite after the services, as people were leaving. The lady recounts that Eliot fell to his knees and began sobbing and clawing at the dirt with his hands, sobbing and clawing for the longest time.

In "The Waste Land,"(1922) there are these lines where a neighbor had planted a sapling in his garden.

"Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year?

O keep the Dog far hence, that's friend to men,

Or with his nails he'll dig it up again!" (72-75).

A cacophony of organ music and "You! hypocrite lecteur!" (76).

Thank you, faithful GRTR readers for sticking with me and my "light research" approach. I always say that my favorite show is the one I hear next.

BOB COCKRUM FRONT AND CENTER

The latest *Radio Recall* has arrived and it is marvelous, as always. Congratulations and a tip of the old Fedora to Bob Cockrum who has written and presented the journal so well these many years. Great research and format! Wishing you the best, Bob, we're sure you will find ways to stay busy, household chores and beyond! Good being in touch. Carry on!

MUSIC BRIDGE AND NETWORK FEED

Beverly taps her clipboard and eyes the clock. Fred pipes in "Fiddler's Green," an acoustic homage to youth and motherhood from the Canadian rockers The Tragically Hip.

All for now. Keep those cards and letters coming!

Next stop, Pittsburgh PA.

Thanks ever, Mark A.