

*The Old Time Radio Club*

Established 1975

# THE ILLUSTRATED PRESS

Number 299

April 2002

**TONIGHT**

*Coca-Cola*

PRESENTS

*The Song Shop*

In a Delightful 45 minute Show

Starring **KITTY CARLISLE**

Featuring **FRANK CRUMIT**

Reed Kennedy . . . Alice Cornett

. . . The Song Shop Quartette . . .

24-Voice Glee Club

under the musical direction of

**GUSTAVE HAENSCHEN**

With a 50-piece orchestra

**WIBX 10 P. M.**

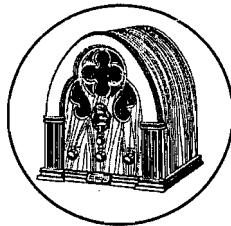
**EVERY  
FRIDAY  
NIGHT**

**Membership information**

New member processing, \$5 plus club membership of \$17.50 per year from January 1 to December 31. Members receive a tape library listing, reference library listing and a monthly newsletter. Memberships are as follows: If you join January-March, \$17.50; April-June, \$14; July-September, \$10; October-December, \$7. All renewals should be sent in as soon as possible to avoid missing issues. Please be sure to notify us if you have a change of address. The *Old Time Radio Club* meets the first Monday of every month at 7:39 PM during the months of September to June at 393 George Urban Blvd., Cheektowaga, NY 14225. The club meets informally during the months of July and August at the same address. Anyone interested in the Golden Age of Radio is welcome. The *Old Time Radio Club* is affiliated with The Old Time Radio Network.

**Club Mailing Address**

Old Time Radio Club  
56 Christen Ct.  
Lancaster, NY 14086



Back issues of *The Illustrated Press* are  
\$1.50 postpaid

**Deadline for *The Illustrated Press* is the  
1st of each month prior to publication.**

*The Illustrated Press* is a monthly newsletter of the *Old Time Radio Club*, headquartered in Western New York State. Contents except where noted are copyright 2002 by the OTRC.

**Send all articles, letters, exchange newsletters,  
etc. to: *The Illustrated Press*  
c/o Ken Krug, Editor (716) 684-5290  
49 Regal Street  
Depew, New York 14043**

**E-Mail address: [AnteakEar@aol.com](mailto:AnteakEar@aol.com)**

**Web Page Address: [www2.pcom.net/robmcd](http://www2.pcom.net/robmcd)**

**Club Officers and Librarians**

**President**

Jerry Collins (716) 683-6199  
56 Christen Ct.  
Lancaster, NY 14086

**Vice President & Canadian Branch**

Richard Simpson  
960 16 Road R.R. 3  
Fenwick, Ontario  
Canada L0S 1C0

**Treasurer, Back Issues, Videos & Records**

Dominic Parisi (716) 884-2004  
38 Ardmore Pl.  
Buffalo, NY 14213

**Membership Renewals, Change of Address,  
Cassette Library - #2000 and up**

Peter Bellanca (716) 773-2485  
1620 Ferry Road  
Grand Island, NY 14072

**Membership Inquires and OTR  
Network Related Items**

Richard Olday (716) 684-1604  
171 Parwood Trail  
Depew, NY 14043

**Tape Libraries**

**Cassettes - #1 up to 1999**

Dan Marafino (716) 684-0733  
19 Church Street  
Lancaster, NY 14086

**Reel-to-Reel and Reference Library**

Ed Wanat, Sr. (716) 895-9690  
393 George Urban Blvd.  
Cheektowaga, NY 14225

Tape Library Rates: All reels and video cassettes are \$1.85 per month; audio cassettes and records are \$.85 per month. Rates include postage and handling and are payable in U.S. funds.

## Ed WANAT's Clips

*(This column is made up of clippings from various publications gathered over the years by Ed Wanat)*

### What's So Funny?



*What works for some comedians doesn't work for others. What worked on radio doesn't necessarily work on television. Goodman Ace, who's written comedy for nearly half a century, examines why.*

By GOODMAN ACE

If you're among those who think comedy shows on television aren't very funny, you're probably right. A good laugh is hard to come by these days, mainly because comedy writers are taking the easy way out. They know that when the laugh track takes over, people think a joke is funny whether it really is or not—and usually it's not.

I suppose if you want to get technical about it, the biggest laughs are mined from carefully developed characters in special situations. Timing is essential, too. The all-time master of this art was Jack Benny. He could achieve laughs even with silence, as happened in one classic radio skit:

Benny is accosted by a holdup man who barks, "Your money or your life." There is silence. The audience titters. As the silence continues, the laughter gradually builds. The gunman repeats, this time more

menacingly, "Your money or your life." There's further silence and louder, more sustained laughter. Finally, the holdup man snarls, "Come on now, your money or your life!" Petulantly, Benny snaps, "I'm thinking!" This gag got the longest, loudest laugh in radio history.

It's important that a comedian always stays within the range of his character. If he strays outside that area, he's in trouble. That happened to Groucho Marx not long ago. Groucho loved to hear jokes, and he thought he could tell them, but he couldn't. And he never stopped trying. He called me from California once and asked if I had anything he could use at the Friars Club. So I gave him the following:

This mother barges into her son's bedroom and finds he's still in bed. She says, "Get up, you (delete) you've got to go to school." He replies, "I ain't going to school today." She says, "You have to go to school." He answers, "I ain't never going to go back there again. They hit me. They throw things. They make fun of my clothes." She says, "First of all, there are two reasons why you have to go to school. Number one, you are 42 years old, and second, you are the principal."

A few days later, Groucho called me back unhappy. "I must have told the joke wrong," he said. "I didn't get any laughs. Maybe I left something out." "Tell me what you said," I responded. So Groucho repeated, "This mother was talking to her little boy who didn't want to go to school. I said, 'Hold it right there. You can't say 'little boy', because the boy is 42 years old in the joke. You gotta say, 'The mother was talking to her son','" Groucho mumbled, "Oh yes, it is funnier that way."

Joke tellers vary in their approaches to jokes. Groucho's style and character didn't lend themselves to the story I gave him, and there's nothing I could say that would convince him of that Groucho was a counter-puncher-type of comic. He needed a foil to play off—his brothers, daffy dowagers like Margaret Dumont, outlandish villains like Douglas Dumbrille or the succession of improbable quiz contestants on *You Bet Your Life*. A standup comic he wasn't.

But I think all performers are bad judges of material. I've always said that if Evelyn Knight and Doris Day ever did a night club act together, they'd call it Doris and Evelyn.

To make it as a standup comic, you need a fast punch in two seconds or less, each gag flowing in rhythmic tempo. Henny Youngman is a good example. Here's a sample of Henny's patter:

something. The psychiatrist answers, 'Of course you can. It is part of your cure to speak up, to be bold, to interact, to transfer your feelings.' So the man says, 'Can you use a partner?'

Everything Youngman says is a non sequitur. They are unrelated to each other. One minute it's the warden bit, then he changes: "How do you like this suit? . . . six pairs of pants and I didn't wear out the jacket!" I love Henny Youngman, but I think what he does is a lot easier than producing the kind of humor that requires character development. For instance, Tallulah Bankhead loved 'sports, so we once gave her the line, "I used to play golf in the 60s," and somebody replied, "The game has changed a lot since then."

You always need a surprise element to avoid getting stale. Once on the *Big Show* on radio many years ago, we had a straight line and nothing around it. But we worked on it to get it right. The scene was played by Tallulah Bankhead and George Sanders. She said, "George, I envy you. You're a great movie star, you play the piano you sing, you've written songs. How do you do all these things?" We didn't have an answer for him, but we knew Sanders well enough to perceive he'd be good with short replies. We wanted to keep within his character framework. So we gave him a one-word reply. When she asked her question, he replied, "Magnificently!" It worked.

The best-written comedy show on television in recent years was *The Mary Tyler Moore Show*. Every time there was a joke, it said something about the character. Take the scene in which Mary was looking through her desk and found the records of the man who preceded her in her job. She discovered he was paid twice what she was getting, so she went over to speak to Mr. Grant. She asked if it were true that her predecessor got twice as much salary. Grant admitted it was true. She asked why, and Grant answered, because the man was married and had a couple of kids. Mary complained about this unfair discrimination. Grant replied, "What do you mean?" She pointed out, "You saw all my school records, my diplomas, my grades." Grant rejoined, "You think I gave you the job because of your school grades and because you were a top pupil?" Mary asked, "Well, Mr. Grant, why did you hire me?" Grant answered, "I hired you because when you stepped into my office, as you walked in, you bumped against the chair and you turned to the chair and said, 'Excuse Me'."

Of course, timing and professionalism, which this show had, are very important, but they can't take the place of writing. One of the smoothest, most profes-

sional performers in show business is Milton Berle. But when he was on television regularly he was 38th in the ratings at the end of his second year.

My agent asked if I would like to write the show. I thought it would be a challenge to bring Berle's ratings up to number one. We did, after three years. We took out a lot of things he had in the show. We cleaned up his stage literally. He would do the powder puff material and it took two weeks to clean up the stage. As a matter of fact, we got him to change his opening, with him appearing in a chorus line of men in top hats, white ties and tails, instead of coming out dressed as a woman in a line of beautiful girls. Then Berle missed some of the steps. He never could get in stride, and by the third week he was back dressed as a woman again.

The later comics are difficult to understand. For instance, I didn't like Lenny Bruce. I didn't see him perform, but from what I've heard and read, he was too far advanced for my tastes. Since he died, his brand of humor has become commonplace (accent on the common).

Shecky Greene is wonderful because he is able to improvise and develop his material on his feet. It's a shame that TV audiences never get a chance to see Shecky at his best.

George Carlin was interesting when he used his radio news routine, but since he started mixing social criticism with his new freaked-out style, he's been working against himself. It's as if Jerry Lewis were to try giving monologues. It just doesn't come off. Don Rickles is really just a pale imitation of the late Jack E. Leonard, and I always said of Leonard that he would really be bad if he ever put together a coherent act.

That big problem is the lack of writing—or the lack of writers trying to be truly funny and speaking about the over-reliance on the laugh machine, I'll have to admit that I used a similar ploy on *Easy Aces* in the days of radio before the machine was invented. The girl who played my wife, Jane's girlfriend, Marge, was hired because she had an infectious laugh. I would say to Jane, "I see where the Italians are putting a clock in the Leaning Tower of Pisa." Jane would ask, "Why?" I would answer, "Because what's the use of having the inclination if you don't have the time?" Marge would laugh. We didn't have ratings in those days, but we kept our sponsor very happy.

A large part of being funny is found in the performer's lifestyle. Jack Benny played a miser, but in

real life he wasn't. He was a patient, generous, dedicated man, qualities that were essential to the type of close-knit show he developed over the years. Groucho Marx, who played a woolly-haired, sharp-tongued zany, was in real life more like the character Jack portrayed.

I remember Groucho inviting me to his house and offering me some orange juice to drink, which I accepted. He asked me if I would like another glass, and I said yes. I could see his discomfort as I gulped it down. He offered me a third glass, but I turned him down. Then apparently completely oblivious to what he was saying, he said, "I'm glad. Oranges don't grow on trees, you know."

I suppose much of my, own comedy material stems from the way I live my personal life. After Jane died, I received a letter from the hospital where she spent her last days. It was addressed to her. It started by reminding her of the excellent care she received and concluded by asking for a donation to the employees' fund. So I answered for her, saying, "I certainly did receive excellent care, except that before I returned home, I happened to die. So a donation will be a little difficult. But maybe at some future date, I will be able to oblige. Yours truly, Jane Ace."

This hospital where Jane died had quite a reputation as a drying-out place for drunks. One famous comic for whom I wrote used to go there at regular intervals. Once, during rehearsals, he didn't show up and the producers were frantically trying to locate him. I remembered that he might be at this hospital, so I called up. They told me he was there—but he'd just left, because he wasn't feeling well.

The more I think about it, the more I realize that what's funny, per se, escapes me. Once, when Bob Hope was a guest on the Perry Como Show, which I wrote for 12 years, Hope was asked to say something complimentary about Perry when he finished singing. He got into a huddle with his writers and came up with the line, "His voice sounds like the mating call of a mashed potato." I asked the producer, "What does that mean? Let's take it out. Nobody will understand it." The producer replied, "Look, Hope didn't complain about any of your jokes. Let's leave it in." So I said, "Okay, but, I bet it'll be a loser." Mashed potato got the biggest laugh on the show. I don't know what it means. But that's the kind of joke that Hope does well, which probably goes to explain why TV networks rely so much on sight.



## LATEST ADDITIONS TO THE CASSETTE LIBRARY

- 3017 Theatre Five "April Snowfall" 3/5/65  
Theatre Five "Last Ride on the Merry-go-round" 3/8/65
- 3018 Theatre Five "The Roper" 6/21/65  
Theatre Five "The Pigeon" 6/22/65
- 3019 Theatre Five "Devotion" 7/5/65  
Theatre Five "Jailbreak" 7/6/65
- 3020 Theatre Five "Around the Corner from Nowhere"  
Theatre Five "Wrong Turning"
- 3021 Theatre Five "Look Who's Talking" 9/28/64  
Theatre Five "Post Time" 2/17/65
- 3022 Theatre Five "In Time of Trouble"  
Theatre Five "Jazz Festival"
- 3023 Theatre Five "Don't Hesitate to Call"  
Theatre Five "Matter of Appreciation"
- 3024 Theatre Five "Whatever Happened to the 5:25?"  
Theatre Five "In Absence of all Intelligent Life"
- 3025 Theatre Five "Justice is an Uncertain Thing" 10/8/64  
Theatre Five "I'm Sorry Mom" 10/9/64
- 3026 Dragnet "James Vickers-Cop Killing" 9/19/49  
Dragnet "Brick Bat Slayer" 9/24/49
- 3027 Great Gildersleeve "The Iron Deer" 10/14/41  
Great Gildersleeve "McGee's Christmas Gift" 12/21/41
- 3028 Dark Fantasy "The Demon Tree" 12/5/41  
Dark Fantasy "Men Call Me Mad" 12/19/41
- 3029 Wild Bill Hickok "Joke Book Bandits" 12/12/52  
Wild Bill Hickok "Trail of the Cougar" 12/10/52
- 3030 The Black Museum "Wool Jacket"  
The Black Museum "Bloodstained Brick"
- 3031 Big Town "Fatal Fix" 12/25/49  
Big Town "Murder in the Snow" 2/1/49
- 3032 The Whistler "Sheriff's Assistant" 4/7/43  
The Whistler "Coincidence" 11/19/45  
The Whistler "Stray Dream" 11/26/45
- 3033 The Whistler "Last Curtain" 2/13/49  
The Whistler "Stormy Weather" 12/12/48  
The Whistler "Teletale Brand" 1/9/49
- 3034 The Whistler "The Return" 5/21/50  
The Whistler "Murder in Mind" 4/16/50  
The Whistler "Return with the Spray" 4/23/50

- 3035 The Whistler "The Seeing Eye"  
The Whistler "Coincidence" 11/19/45
- 3036 My Favorite Husband "George's Present"  
12/16/49  
My Friend Irma "Christmas Party" 12/20/48  
Fibber McGee and Molly "Best Christmas  
Decorations" 12/20/48



## Book Reviews

### "Radio Network Prime Time Programming, 1926 - 1967"

A Book Review by DAN MARAFINO

Forty-one years. This is the period of time it took network radio to rise and fall. When compared to the cosmic clock, the blink of an eye, but so much happened during that blink. The author, Mitchell E. Shapiro, has put together a book that lists every program ever to appear on network radio.

The first thing one notices about the book is the thickness in relation to the content. Were there really that many programs on network radio between the hours of seven to eleven P.M.? Yes, and Mr. Shapiro has included them all. This is not the kind of book one would read as in chapters and a story line, rather the author has done it in a daily graph format. Down the sides are the dates in months and years and across the top, the hours from 7-11 P.M.

The format of the book is extremely simple to follow with the use of symbols to guide you. Examples of these would be DR = dramas, MY = mystery and so on using two letters to indicate the different types of shows. One should have no problem at all using this system.

The four networks are CBS, NBC Red, Mutual and NBC Blue which later became ABC. They are listed in graph form on a daily basis. Let's take Sunday nights for example: CBS lists its evening schedule followed by any changes or moves it may make for that day, and the graph may take a couple pages to include the years 1926-1967. Next NBC Red has its Sunday evening schedule, then Mutual and NBC Blue. Each day is done this way. After each day the program moves are listed, again for the 41 year span. By the time one reaches Saturday, the amount of shows that were aired over the

networks is indeed staggering and yet the author has listed each and every one. Indeed an incredible undertaking.

Forty-one years of the best entertainment that anyone could ask for has come and gone in its original form, but there were those of us who were and still are determined not to let it die. Old Time Radio lives on through clubs and individuals who simply won't let it die.

This book is one such instrument that will keep OTR breathing for a long time to come. A very sincere thank you to the author, Mitchell E. Shapiro for recognizing this and writing this book. It most certainly should be on every OTR buff's bookshelf.

*RADIO NETWORK PRIME TIME PROGRAMMING, 1926-1967.* Publication date May 2002, McFarland & Company, Inc. Publishers, Box 611, Jefferson, North Carolina 28640. Order line 1-800-253-2187.

640 pages, hard cover library binding (7" x 10")  
Price: \$95.00, Postpaid Price \$99.00

### "The Early Days of Radio Broadcasting"

A Book Review by KEN KRUG

Here is a book jam packed with facts and figures related to the early history and development of radio and its subsequent acceptance by the public at large. It is a reprint of the original work published in 1987 written by George H. Douglas.

The author covers the early theory of the existence of electromagnetic waves and the possibility of their being propagated through space. The later development of Hertzian Waves by the German scientist Heinrich Hertz was based on that theory. Further experiments and improvements by Guglielmo Marconi resulted in the successful transmission of intelligible signals across space, first from a few feet, then to several miles until signals were finally sent across the Atlantic Ocean from England to Newfoundland.

Emerging crystal radio sets used by hobbyists, later amateur receiving sets, the emergence of Westinghouse and the American Telephone and Telegraph Company garnering an interest in the young and fascinating concept of radio broadcasting. Governments recognizing the potential for military and naval use of radio. All these aspects are thoroughly covered, along with the humble beginnings of broadcasting stations set up in factories and warehouses.

After World War I came to an end the United States entered an era of unparalleled growth in the American economy. Radio grew along with the economy during the decade of the twenties and marketing of the fledgling radio industry fell into the hands of the Radio Corporation of America. An agreement was reached between RCA, Westinghouse and General Electric that allowed Westinghouse and GE to manufacture equipment and be sold by RCA. RCA was not allowed to manufacture equipment on its own.

During the twenties newscasting, sportscasting and educational programs began to surface. Experiments with multiple broadcast stations along the northeast seaboard eventually led to network programming.

Classical music, popular music and scheduled programs lengthened the broadcast day. The arrival of Amos 'n' Andy played by Freeman F. Gosden and Charles J. Correll drew huge audiences. The author covers these two radio comedians in extensive detail.

All-in-all I would say this book is a must have for any serious collector of old time radio as it delves into the era before the "Golden Age" and gives insight as to how that entertainment medium eventually developed.

**THE EARLY DAYS OF RADIO BROADCASTING**  
Publication date April 2002, McFarland & Company, Inc. Publishers, Box 611, Jefferson, North Carolina 28640.

Order line 1-800-253-2187 - [www.mcfarlandpub.com](http://www.mcfarlandpub.com)

256 pages, paperback (6" x 9")  
Price \$25.00, Postpaid Price \$29.00

## The Aldrich Family

REPRINT FROM RADIO VARIETIES, APRIL, 1940

Like the proverbial Topsy, *The Aldrich Family* just grew from a three-minute comedy spot on the *Kate Smith Hour* a year ago, this neat little serial piece by Clifford Goldsmith already is close on the heels of the long-established big shot shows, and like Henry, its teenage hero, is far from having its growth.

When Goldsmith wrote the comedy *What A Life* and sold it to producer George Abbott they figured that with a fair amount of luck it was good for a year on Broadway. A Nice little show about high school life as it can be found in most any old town if one digs around, it had Ezra Stone as its hero "Henry Aldrich." When it was being cast, Ezra dropped over to th Abbott office for a reading. A line in the play called for his unruly red



Ezra Stone who plays the leading role of the mischievous Henry Aldrich

hair to be parted just so. No matter how hard it was brushed, it dropped unoblingly back where it was to begin with. The upshot was that the lines pertaining to hair were written out but Ezra wouldn't have cared much one way or the other.

He'd just concluded a highly successful run of a year and a half as the recalcitrant frosh in *Brother Rat*. Spanked through four hilarious acts every night with matinees Wednesday and Saturday, the young actor probably felt he had a rest coming.

However, it's safe to assume that Ezra wouldn't have missed that role for love nor money if he'd suspected that long after *What A Life* was gathering dust on the shelves, young Henry Aldrich would be marching on to new triumphs in radio.

Loud speaker addicts had their first taste of the Aldriches in the summer of 1938 when Rudy Vallee fired them into a guest spot on his then thriving Thursday variety hour. Arthur Goldsmith was hauled out of bed with instructions to confect a three minute skit about Henry and his folks on just eight hours notice. Perhaps because he was nearest that room at the moment, Cliff's setting for the sketch—you may remember it—was the bathroom. Henry ensconced therein refused to be budged through the required three minutes of comedy. When the Aldriches went on tour last month, the skit was dusted off and found good for the same hearty laughs it drew on the Vallee show.

However, despite the evident appetite of the public for more Henry Aldrich, *What A Life* continued brightly along on Broadway, with no more nibbles from radio for another five months.

When Ted Collins, the *Kate Smith Hour* producer, was looking around for a mild hypo for his show last February, he happened onto *What A Life*. Clifford Goldsmith learning through his agents that he was to make a radio serial character out of Henry Aldrich, he was scared stiff. The idea of plotting a set of new comedy lines each week was appalling to this quiet-spoken lecturer and ex-school teacher. But just as he did with his Vallee assignment, Cliff came across.

His own youngsters, a better than average memory of his own adolescence and a vivid imagination turned the trick then, and has been turning it since. His flair for dialogue makes for good reading even from script which is a feather in the bonnet of any radio writer. However, without Ezra Stone to put the lines across, it is doubtful if Henry Aldrich would hold the place that he does today in the hearts of his millions of listeners.

Ezra Stone is Henry Aldrich—or vice versa. Hardly out of the age group that would rather sip sodas with its best girl at the corner drug store than sup with kings, Ezra, just 21, is, in a sense, living in radio an adolescence he never had time to enjoy in actual life.

Currently conceded to be Broadway's busiest young man, what with his work in *See My Lawyer*, his production activities in *Reunion In New York*, his teaching at the American Academy of Dramatic Art and his radio chores, it was much like this with Ezra as far back as he can remember.

Born in New Bedford, he would have no part in the fishing industry that had been long his family's business interest. He was transplanted at an early age to Philadelphia for his schooling which he picked up in a sort of catch-as-catch-can fashion when not busy at something else. When most youngsters were thinking of how best to spend their next vacations, Ezra already had turned to the stage.

He didn't even wait to be graduated from the American Academy of Arts in New York. He'd more than matriculated before one of its teachers pushed him into a bit part in the Theater Guild's production *Parade*. It lasted only seven weeks but that was enough of a start for Ezra Stone.

That plays he managed subsequently to be cast for had a way of folding before they'd much more than started was part of the fun. He'd become so accustomed to flops

that he was a little surprised when *Three Men On A Horse* showed signs of lasting a while. Before it had run its long and hilarious course, Ezra had advanced from understudy to the regular cast.

As if this wasn't enough, he was making it his business meanwhile to learn the angles of the producers office routine. This involved reading scripts, suggesting actors whenever a play was ready to be cast and such little items as taking up slack in the cost of printing handbills led to his being made casting director.

## The Mystery of Jack Benny's Melted Maxwell

by BOB MADISON

Scratch an old-time radio buff and you'll get an opinion. Who was the best Shadow? What was the real nationality of Kato? Why was the Creaking Door never oiled? What was a ventriloquist doing on radio? And, most importantly, what about Benny's Maxwell? Ah . . . the great mystery.

Unquestionably one of the most popular of shows, if not arguably the best remembered comedy program. *The Jack Benny Show* is the focus of one of the most die-hard, rabid sections of radio fandom.

"Two things really strike me about Benny," says Benny expert Rich Conaty, a major to Harper Perennial's *Jack Benny, The Radio and Television Work*. "One is that Benny was almost 'penalized' because he chose to go into a mass medium. Most People didn't think of Benny as a 'fictional' creation like Chaplin's Tramp or Tom Sawyer. Benny is denigrated for focus on radio rather than a 'loftier' medium, films for instance. Two is that today's sitcoms run out of steam after the first half season. He could do 39 fresh and wonderful shows for 23 years." They are still fresh and wonderful. Even today, the names are magic. Think of the supporting cast: Mary Livingston, Mel Blanc, Don Wilson, Eddie Anderson, Phil Harris, Frank Nelson, Kenny Baker, among others. One of the finest ensembles in the medium. One of the most popular and endearing "regulars" was Benny's 1927 Maxwell (license plate number 4X 88 61). It was first introduced in the Oct. 24, 1937 broadcast, while Jell-O was the program's sponsor. Benny tells announcer Don Wilson that he has traded in his Stanley Steamer for a "new" car, a Maxwell. "It's in swell shape," he crows, apologizing for its lack of a radio. "But there's a Victorola on the steering wheel" he adds.



Kenny Baker enters with the news that there is a crowd outside around the Maxwell waiting "to see the guy who would ride in it."

Contrary to popular belief, legendary voice-man and Benny regular Mel Blanc was not always the Maxwell's "voice." Blanc simply was not part of the show when the Maxwell first appeared. A huge pile of junk on the sound effects table, including horns and roller skates, sat ready next to the NBC microphone. The identity of the first Maxwell sound effects man, who pre-dates Virgil Reime, is part of the mystery. Conaty reveals that his full name is now lost, but his first name was "Pinto."

Conaty suggests that Benny's longevity is closely connected to his ensemble cast, including the Maxwell. "It's amazing that he kept virtually the same ensemble for so long," he said. "The show basically stayed the same from 1934 on, when they locked in the format. Some of the Chevrolet shows, except for the sponsor, are just like the Jell-O programs."

The Maxwell becomes more than a regular and something of a magic carpet, thanks to the medium of radio, that transports Benny and guests to any location the writer finds fit to put Jack and crew in. Called "that gasoline snail" by Phil Harris, it would develop into one of the most important plot devices of the show. By the Oct. 20, 1940 episode, Benny is ready to sell the Maxwell. Jack, Mary and Rochester visit a Packard dealer to discuss trading in his beloved car. When Jack learns they plan on junking it once the deal is done, he cancels.

In 1942, Jack turns the Maxwell over to a scrap metal drive to be recycled—all part of the wartime drive. It is still present as late as the Oct. 4, 1942 show, as once again Benny gathers the cast in his Maxwell. On the Oct. 18 program, Benny finally gives the car away to the war effort. Bob Crosby was guest band leader as Phil Harris was in the service at the time. During one sequence of the show, set in Chicago, bombers are heard overhead, sounding like the Maxwell.

Benny recreated his sacrifice the following week on *The March of Time*. And so the Maxwell seems to disappear for the duration.

Benny is behind the wheel of a car in a program broadcast over Armed Forces Radio (I have conflicting information on this, it's either *Command Performance* or *Mail Call*), where he picks up his date for the show, Ann Sheridan. The Maxwell next appears on *Jubilee*, air date March 13, 1945. Produced for black GIs and

usually featuring jazz artists, Rochester made more appearances on this show than any other artist. In the course of the show, Rochester pawns the Maxwell to get Benny's violin out of hock.

Gone for most of the war, except for these non-Benny appearances, the Maxwell remains absent for an additional four years.

On Jan. 2, 1949, Jack returned to CBS after 16 years with Luck Strike as his sponsor. Rochester restarts the Maxwell, taking Jack and Mary to their new CBS studio. (Mel Blanc supplied the Maxwell's voice.) No explanation is provided for this return, a resurrection nothing short of miraculous. Perhaps CBS brass simply *liked* the Maxwell and wanted it back. Or, the Benny writers found it a convenient plot device and wanted as much continuity as they could provide during a change of networks. Perhaps.

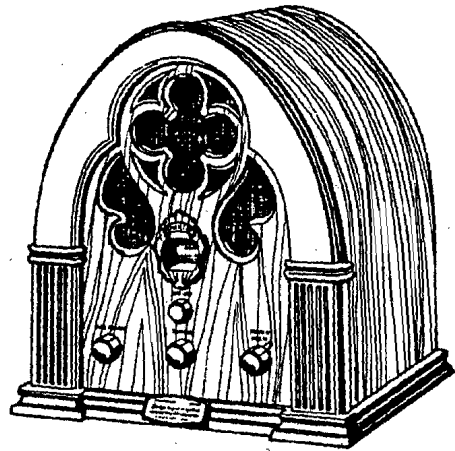
In my mind I have formed a more elaborate theory: Benny drives the Maxwell to the scrap collector, a voice provided by Frank Nelson, perhaps, ready to make the supreme sacrifice. Upon examination, perhaps Nelson pays Benny to keep it. Or explains to him that the Allies want to *win* the war.

The explanation, if explanation there was, is now lost. Now about that ventriloquist on the radio . . .



# Old Time Radio Club

49 Regal Street  
Depew, NY 14043

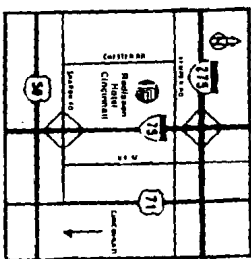


FIRST CLASS MAIL

## The Golden Radio Buffs of Maryland

are planning a Party to celebrate their 30th Anniversary on Saturday, May 4, 2002 from 5-9 PM. Tickets are by reservation only, and are \$18.50 member, \$20.00 non-member and \$25.00 at the door.

For tickets reservations and further information, call Gene Leitner, (410) 477-3051



**RADISSON HOTEL**  
11320 CHESTER RD.  
CINCINNATI, OHIO  
45246 (513) 772-1720  
ROOMS: \$77  
SINGLE OR DOUBLE  
(MENTION SHOW WHEN  
MAKING RESERVATIONS)  
MORE INFORMATION  
CALL BOB BURDALETT  
(513) 282-0333

# OLD TIME RADIO & NOSTALGIA CONVENTION

GACINNANTS  
16th ANNUAL

WITH PEG LYNCH & BOB HASTINGS  
**EITHEL & ALBERT**

**ROSEMARY RICE**  
ARCHIE ANDREWS  
I REMEMBER MAMA

**HAL STONE**  
"JUGHEAD"  
ARCHIE ANDREWS

**TYLER MAYER**  
FIBBER FUDGE LIMOLLY  
BURKS & ALLEN

**ESTHER GEDDES**  
(MRS. TYLER MAYER)  
GOLDEN DAYS OF RADIO  
THE MAGIC GARDEN

**APRIL 19-20, 2002**  
HOURS: FRIDAY 9AM-9PM  
SATURDAY 9AM-4PM