

Past Times

No. 28 THE NOSTALGIA ENTERTAINMENT NEWSLETTER \$5.00

A Celebration of Radio Teamwork



Fibber McGee & Molly

Radio was a medium which created images in the listener's mind through dialogue—and since it was easier to create those images if each character had someone else to talk to, it's no surprise that teams became a staple of radio programs. Most of them were comedy teams, but there were a few dramatic ones as well.

Some well-known radio teams, along with a few surprising combinations, are celebrated in Radio Spirits' new four-volume box set **Old Time Radio Showbiz Teams** (\$24.95 for cassettes, \$34.95 for compact discs). The collection includes 12 shows,

with expected duos such as Abbott & Costello joined by non-comedic pairs (The Lone Ranger and Tonto; Batman and Robin).

An episode of *Suspense!* from 1949, "The Red-Headed Woman," has a nail-biting performance from an off-mike team who would become internationally famous as an on-camera comedy team a couple of years later. Lucille Ball stars as a secretary who's purloined \$21,000 in payroll money and taken it on the lam, where she encounters a young Latin gent (Desi Arnaz) who fits the description of a wanted bank robber.

The radio predecessors of *I Love Lucy* are represented here by *The Burns & Allen Show* (George takes over the grocery shopping while Gracie tries to get her new play produced), *Fibber McGee & Molly* (this episode's get-rich-quick scheme is Fibber's new model airplane demonstrating his unique theory of aviation), *Ozzie and Harriet* (Bing Crosby just drops by for dinner) and even the Bickersons (a 1947 episode of *Drene Time* which has the usual battle between John and Blanche, and some nonsensical songs from co-star Danny Thomas). Another team that was wedded in real life but not on radio is Bogie and Bacall, heard here in a very exciting episode of *Bold Venture* (their series which was syndicated through 1951) in which the pair is forced to search for some Spanish gold.

The more traditional two-man teams are here, too. Bud Abbott and Lou Costello are in a 1944 episode in which demented doctor Peter Lorre tries to cure Lou of the flu; the "flee-flu" routine is a highlight. A&C's radio series didn't always showcase the team at their best, relying on insults and truly awful puns for much of its humor. But the *Martin and Lewis Show* from January 4, 1952 is a wonderful surprise, with Dean and Jerry displaying much more warmth, charm and subtlety than is common in the pair's movies. Guest Mona Freeman is charming, too, and obliquely goes through the paces of an Eskimo sketch starring Jerry as "Nanook the Schnook."

Far removed from the citified comedy of those two teams are Chester Lauck and Norris Goff, better remembered as Lum and Abner. An excellent 1949 episode has Lum struggling to find a newsworthy story for his newspaper column while enduring distractions

Continued on Page 25

Capra's 100th Celebrated on VHS

Frank Capra was born on May 18, 1897, and to commemorate the event, Columbia Tri-Star Home Video has released **The Frank Capra Centennial Collection** on VHS videocassettes. The new series marks the reissue of several old favorites, such as *It Happened One Night*, *You Can't Take it With You*, *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* and *Lost Horizon*. Happily, it also marks the debut of some of the director's finest lesser-known early films.

Miracle Woman (1931) was controversial for its depiction of an evangelist obviously patterned after Aimee Semple McPherson and played by Barbara Stanwyck, who at the time was usually portraying ladies who were not exactly sinless. Soul-saving turns into big business in this film, which foreshadows some of the problems encountered decades later by our mass-media ministers.

The Bitter Tea of General Yen (1933) is a real departure for Capra, with Stanwyck again, this time falling under the spell of a Chinese warlord (played by the decidedly un-Chinese Nils Asther). A very moody, mysterious and sensuous film, and not "Capra-corn" at all.

Platinum Blonde (1931) is a real pip, a wonderful comedy starring Robert Williams (who undoubtedly would've become a star had he not died soon after the film's completion) as a snappy reporter who marries a rich girl (Jean Harlow) but realizes that he'd be happier with the plain-jane who really loves him (Loretta Young). It's sort of an *It Happened One Night* in reverse, and lots of fun.

American Madness (1932) is a snapshot of its time, with Walter Huston as a bank president during the Depression; it's

Continued on Page 12

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Harry Langdon's Lost Feature.....	3	Tram, Bix, Jelly, Satch	14
Stan and Ollie's Co-Stars	7	Carson Robison's Cowboy Songs	18
Silents and Talkies on Laserdisc	9	<i>Suspense!</i> , Superman & Freberg	21
Film Festivals Noted.....	11	Martin & Lewis on Radio.....	26
Isham Jones on CD.....	13	Radio's Great Newscasters.....	30

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See Page 31

NOSTALGIA NEWSWIRE

Having issued commemorative stamps honoring silent film actors, comedians, songwriters, vintage comic strips, bandleaders and blues singers, The U.S. Postal Service currently salutes Warner Bros. own **Bugs Bunny**. This has caused many stamp collectors to shriek in outrage about commercialism because Bugs is still such an omnipresent corporate image. Our view at PT is that Bugs' image may be on many products, but he's also been a universally beloved character for 57 years. Speaking of universal, on September 30, the **Universal** movie monsters will be saluted; **Boris Karloff** will be depicted twice, as Frankenstein's monster and as the Mummy; **Lon Chaney** will have a portrait as the Phantom of the Opera (more suitable artwork than the unrecognizable image of him as the Hunchback drawn by **Hirschfeld** a couple of years ago); **Lon Chaney, Jr.** will rip it up as the Wolf Man; and **Bela Lugosi** will be shown as Dracula (wonder if his stamp comes with two extra perforations?).....Universal Home Video is marking the event with a new promotional push for the classic '30s horror films; the firm is also releasing some double-feature tapes of the early '40s *Inner Sanctum* film series, among them the great Chaney, Jr. epic *Dead Man's Eyes*.

Pianist **Dick Hyman** performed two recently rediscovered **Bix Beiderbecke** compositions at the JVC Jazz Festival in New York—these pieces (in the vein of the classic "In a Mist") are entitled "Cloudy" and "By a Brook." "Cloudy" was played by Bix's friend, Indiana bandleader **Charlie Davis**, in the documentary *Bix: "Ain't None of Them Play Like Him Yet"* available on VHS and laserdisc from Playboy Home Video. Trumpeter **Randy Sandke** also recreated some Bix cornet parts and some **Louis Armstrong** material. Our question now is, since **Jelly Roll Morton** and other jazz immortals have been immortalized on stamps—where's the Bix stamp?...

On the home video front, more vintage films are being made available on the new DVD format. DVD isn't a done deal just yet, though. Most titles are from Warner Home Video (which owns the MGM/UA label), and those are only being made available in seven major U.S. cities for six months as a test-marketing procedure. MGM/UA has released the 1949 **Tracy-Hepburn** comedy *Adam's Rib*, and Warner has released *Strangers on a Train*, the 1951 **Hitchcock** classic. In what's probably the best example yet of DVD's possibilities for vintage films, the disc of *Strangers* has both the standard American version and the British edition (which runs about two minutes longer and has variations in some scenes, including an entirely different ending). You'll also get five Hitchcock trailers, as well as newsreel footage of the director—all in a package that lists for \$24.95 (and which is readily available for 19.95). Silent films aren't being neglected: Lumivision is releasing the silents *The Phantom of the Opera* and *The Lost World*. Some vintage public-domain films are also coming to the market from the UAV company, notably *Royal Wedding* (1951), and a DVD called *The Young Duke Series*, which edits three of **John Wayne's** mid-'30s Westerns (among them one called *The Fugitive*) into a program running a total of 70 minutes; further, all three films have been colorized and their soundtracks have been rechanneled into stereo....

Forthcoming compact discs include the first two volumes of a complete **Coon-Sanders Nighthawks** series from The Old Masters; discs devoted to the **Roger Wolfe Kahn** and **George Olsen** '20s dance bands from Parklane; new **Ruth Etting** and **Ted Lewis** CDs from Take Two; and a double-disc collection of World War I songs from the Good Music Record Company. Newly released items include a two-disc complete collection of the 1923-24 **King Oliver** band on the revitalized Retrieval label. From the major labels, there's a new two-CD collection from Sony with all of the **Les Brown/Doris Day** collaborations. They'll be reviewed in PT, so stay tuned.

When ordering books reviewed in *Past Times*, please note that prices are retail and do not include shipping. You should add \$4.00 for the first book, .75 each additional book, plus applicable state sales tax.

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See Page 31

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CALENDAR

Please send notice of forthcoming events to: Past Times, 7308 Fillmore Drive, Buena Park CA 90620. Be sure to include a phone number for additional information.

FILM EVENTS & FESTIVALS

Cinecon 33, Glendale CA, Aug 28-Sept. 1. Rare silents and early talkies, dealers' room of memorabilia; guests include Patty Andrews, June Havoc, Vincent Sherman, Gloria Jean, Kathryn Grayson, Baby Marie Osborne. Info: Cinecon, P.O. Box 418, Rancho Mirage CA 92270; (818) 973-2209.

8th Annual Fall Cinesation, Saginaw MI, Sept. 26-28. Silents (with live pipe-organ accompaniment) and talkies in the historic Temple Theater. Info: Cinesation, Box 352, Frankenmuth MI 48734; (810) 471-1809; Cinesation@aol.com.

Keaton & Chaplin 5th Annual Celebration, Iola KS, Sept. 26-27. Guests include Eleanor Keaton, film historian David Robinson, preservationist David Shepard, actor James Karen; Keaton/Chaplin film festival. Info: Bowlus Fine Arts Center, 205 E. Madison, Iola KS 66749; (316) 365-4765. <http://www.iolaks.com/keaton/>

MUSIC EVENTS & FESTIVALS

Earlyjas Fall Festival, Strongsville OH, Sept. 19-21. Traditional jazz bands such as the Boilermakers, the New Orleans Stompers, Eagle Jazz Band. Info: EARLYJAS, 3022 Kemble Dr., Akron OH 44319; (216) 896-9842.

Fats Waller Memorial Jazz Festival, Watsonville CA, Sept. 19-21. Tribute to the great pianist with Big Tiny Little, Creole Jazz Kings, Hot Frogs. Info: 343 Soquel Ave. #49, Santa Cruz CA 95062; (408) 662-1912.

Socal Jazzfest, Buena Park CA, Sept. 26-28. 1920s and '30s-style bands, dance and costume contests, USO canteen. Info: Jazz Club of Southern Calif., P.O. Box 15212, Long Beach CA 90815; (714) 522-7000.

Kansas City Ragtime and Vintage Jazz Celebration, Kansas City MO, Oct. 10-11. Info: Kansas City Ragtime Revelry, 5203 W. 79th Terr., Prairie Village KS 66208; (913) 648-2591.

Tom Turpin Ragtime Festival, Savannah GA, Oct. 22-26. Terry Waldo, Dave Jasen, Richard Zimmerman and other great pianists and bands. Info: 207 E. 44th St., Savannah GA 31405; (914) 233-9989.

OLD-TIME RADIO/TV EVENTS

Friends of Old-Time Radio Convention, Newark NJ, Oct. 23-25. Dozens of guests including Alan Young, Jackson Beck, Eddie Bracken, Janet Waldo; a One Man's Family reunion, recreations of I Remember Mama, The Cisco Kid, others. Info: Jay Hickerson, Box 4321, Hamden CT 06514; (203) 248-2887; JayHick@aol.com

SPERDVAC Convention, Los Angeles CA, November 7-9. Guests, show recreations, dealers' room. Info: Larry Gassman, (562) 947-9800.

25th Anniversary Golden Mike Awards, Baltimore Boumi Temple, MD, Sept. 6. Info: Gene Leitner, (401) 477-3051.

Movies

AFI's Catalog of 1920s Films Returns

In 1968, the American Film Institute launched an ambitious documentation project: a filmographic tool that would assist historians and others in the preservation of our national film heritage. The second volume in the series, which covered the 1960s, was greeted with dismay, due to the abundance of documentation already available and the often less than memorable nature of the films themselves.

The first volume, however, was considered something of a landmark, and an indispensable resource from the moment it was published in 1971. It nevertheless went out of print and became a much-in-demand book in recent years, selling for several times its original price. Now **The American Film Institute Catalog of Motion Pictures Produced in the United States: Feature Films 1921-1930** (University of California) is back in print, happily for those who did not have the foresight to acquire it the last time around.

The book includes detailed cast lists, credits and synopses not only for such classics as *Ben-Hur*, *The Crowd*, *The Gold Rush*, *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* and *The Virginian*, but for thousands of obscure films—6,606 in all. Production company, distributor, release date, copyright date and dossier number, gauge and length (in number of reels and footage, not minutes) are also noted. The index is a virtual chronicle of careers both glorious and anonymous.

The two-volume book is still indispensable—nothing has replaced it—especially because so many of the films of this era have been lost. But the details on many popular titles are inexplicably skimpy—*Sherlock Jr.* and *The Freshman* to name two—and there are numerous sins of omission. The errors inherent in the first edition are the same, for no changes have been made; the AFI has been collecting addata and errata since the book was first published, but chose to exclude them from the reprint. This is a serious mistake, a crime against the community of serious film researchers and historians, and a decision at odds with the purposes of the AFI itself.

— Jordan R. Young

Langdon's Lost Feature on VHS

By Richard M. Roberts



If your taste for Harry Langdon has been whetted by Kino on Video's recent re-release of his three major silent features, then you may want to check out some of his other work, now available from Grapevine Video.

Grapevine offers Langdon's first silent feature, **His First Flame** (order no. HFFFHL, \$17.85). For years, this obscure film, produced by Mack Sennett during Langdon's second year at the Fun Factory, was an anomaly in the Langdon filmographies. Those historians who mentioned it at all usually listed it as a short comedy. There also seemed to be some uncertainty as to when it was released. Though

made in 1925, the film was withheld from public view by Sennett until 1927. *His First Flame* hit the theaters following Langdon's First National feature *Long Pants*. The critics lambasted the film, labelling it old fashioned (as if styles had changed so drastically in two years). However, the film did well at the boxoffice, making it Langdon's last financially successful feature. Unfortunately, *His First Flame* contributed to the oversaturation of audiences with Langdon material in 1926-27 (five feature films and numerous backlogged shorts). Coupled with the bad publicity after Langdon's firing of director Frank Capra plus the failure of Langdon's personally-directed features, this sent his career as a major comedy star into a tailspin in 1928.

His First Flame was shrouded in total obscurity for the next sixty years, surviving in a rarely shown 3-reel Kodascope version, a 16mm print made for home and library use. In the late 1980s, a decomposing 35mm nitrate print of the complete 5-reel feature was uncovered in Los Angeles. A new print was reconstructed, saving the usable nitrate and filling the gaps with the 16mm Kodascope. This is still the only surviving version. It lacks one major sequence, in which Harry imagines himself as a baby, but otherwise shines as an example of prime Langdon.

Harry is the son of fire chief and woman hater Vernon Dent, who is trying to stop Harry's marriage to gold-digger Natalie Kingston. After major detours in the plot (which involve Harry with petty crooks, cause him to dress in drag and then go off for dinner with buddy Bud Jamison and his battling wife), Harry meets Ruth Hiatt, a nice girl, and falls in love with her. Though the story is footloose, *His First Flame* is full of choice Langdon bits. Produced at the peak of Langdon's working relationship with his Sennett production team (director Harry Edwards, writers Frank Capra and Arthur Ripley), the film proves that Harry was ready for feature films.

Although Langdon's silent work has been neglected for decades, even more ignored and unjustly defamed is Langdon's work in talking pictures. Considered washed up even before the coming of talkies, Langdon continued to work as a starring comic in movies for the next fifteen years, ultimately making far more sound films than silents. Much of this work was in two-reelers and B-features; however compromised, Langdon's talent frequently shines through in these films. Contrary to frequently uninformed opinion, Harry's character translated well into talkies under the right circumstances—his voice, with its strange, halting delivery, suited the character perfectly.

Grapevine Video offers a couple of opportunities to view some of Langdon's talkie work. A trio of **Harry Langdon Talkies** (HLT, \$14.95) features two shorts from the series Langdon made for Educational Pictures in 1933 which, along with his series for Hal Roach in 1929-30, ranks among his finest talkie work.

Reunited with his Sennett partner Vernon Dent, and working under the supervision of veteran comedy producer/director Arvid E. Gillstrom, Langdon found himself in a very sympathetic environment at Educational. The first comedy, *Knight Duty*, locks Harry in a wax museum in the middle of the night with two crooks trying to recover a stolen jewel they've planted on him. *The Stagehand* was actually written and directed by Langdon, one of the few chances he had at that sort of control in talkies. In this very strange and amusing little film, Harry is involved in an amateur theatrical society. The first half of the film is devoted to Harry's rehearsal with his fellow thespians at the home of a rich patron.

Continued on Page 4

Mae West as Auteur

There have been many books about the fabulous Mae West—biographies, collections of her plays, writings about her films, examinations of Mae as cultural icon, “empress of sex,” symbol of “feminist camp,” and an “American Woman of Achievement”



(!). The one aspect of Mae that hasn't been looked at until now is really the most important one: Mae West as a playwright and actress. The wise-cracking, libidinous character that everyone loved (some more than once) has become such a well-known symbol that it has overtaken the very talented artist who made “Mae West” come alive.

This situation has been well remedied with **Becoming Mae West** by Emily Wortis Leider (Farrar, Straus & Giroux; 448 pages, hardcover; \$30.00). The book is about how the writer created the character—which is why the book ends in 1938, after the Paramount studio (which she'd saved from bankruptcy) dropped her. Much of it takes place during the Teens and Twenties; we watch Mae turn from a vaudeville singer into a comedienne and playwright, whose scandalous stage offering *Sex* actually got her thrown into jail (but generated some welcome publicity). The 30 photos include sheet-music covers which show how Mae reinvented herself during these early years.

Ms. Leider states that censors basically ended Miss West's film career. Marybeth Hamilton, in a piece contained in **Movie Censorship and American Culture** (edited by Francis G. Couvares; Smithsonian Institution Press; 334 pages; hardcover \$45, paperback \$17.95) argues that censors actually helped create Mae's film character, giving it a much more comedic tone, and backs this up with correspondence during the pre-production for *She Done Him Wrong*. Ms. Hamilton's own book about Mae, *When I'm Bad, I'm Better*, will soon be reprinted by the University of California Press. All titles are available through retail outlets and online from Amazon.com Books, which you can access at <http://www.amazon.com>.

Langdon's Silent and Sound Rarities on Video

Continued from Page 3

Unfortunately, Harry gets sidetracked from his acting when he and a friend start sampling the wares of the patron's secret bar; this is a long, hilarious and apparently much ad-libbed sequence. The second half of the film is devoted to the evening's performance of the play, a melodrama which Harry sabotages in typically bumbling style. Though Langdon never completely succeeds as a director (he never fully understood pacing or the importance of a strong narrative to his character), Langdon's self-directed films benefit from the eccentric detailing of his unique comic mind. One hopes Kino on Video can release Langdon's *Three's a Crowd* and *The Chaser*, the two surviving silent features he helmed. Neither film is anywhere near as inept as legend has it. In fact, both are fascinating films which explore new dimensions of the Langdon character, and they contain many wonderful Langdon gags.

The third short on the tape is another rarity seldom listed in Langdon filmographies. *Love, Honor and Obey the Law* is a 1935 promotional film produced for B.F. Goodrich tires. No director is credited, but it is believed that Langdon wrote and directed this film as well. Here Harry is on his way to marry the police chief's daughter. His Poppa-in-law to be threatens that if he gets another moving-violation ticket on the way to the wedding, everything is off. Best man Monty Collins actually wants the bride-to-be for himself, and does everything he can to get Harry pulled over. The only connection to Goodrich tires is the driver's safety angle; otherwise this is a standard two-reel comedy. All three shorts show how amusing Langdon could be in talkies.

During the sound era, Langdon occasionally got the chance to star in a feature, although usually in a B-movie for one of the poverty row studios. **Misbehaving Husbands** (MHHL, \$14.95) is a 1940 programmer Langdon headlined for PRC, one of the lowest of the low-budget companies. Shoestring settings aside, it's an enjoyable little film. Directed by the dependable William Beaudine, Langdon works with a fine cast of veterans, including former silent movie seductress Betty Blythe—here middle-aged and down to earth as Harry's spouse. Also along are Ralph Byrd (taking time off from *Dick Tracy* serials) and Esther Muir, the statuesque blonde from The Marx Brothers' *A Day at the Races*.

Harry plays an absent-minded department store publicist who manages to forget his 25th wedding anniversary. Engrossed in dressing the store's window displays, he misses the surprise party wife Betty has planned. While driving a blonde mannequin to a repair shop, Harry is spotted by Esther, who thinks Harry is stepping out. Esther sets Betty up with her divorce attorney, who then makes the couple divide the house in half while they live under the same roof. Enter Harry's nephew (Byrd), who chaperones the separated couple and does his best to reconcile them—and to prove that Betty's attorney is a shyster.

The humor in *Misbehaving Husbands* is low-key and pleasant. It's interesting to see Langdon play a more normal character; he was 55 when he made the film and was getting far too old to project babyish innocence. Nevertheless, he injects some of his trademark humor and mannerisms into his part and still proves his potential as a character actor.

Picture quality on all three tapes is fine. *His First Flame* has some unavoidable variation in quality due to the switch from 35mm to 16mm preprint materials. The soundtrack on *Knight Duty* is a bit noisy but acceptable. *Misbehaving Husbands* was taken from a beautiful 16mm original and is the best quality video release of this subject.

Harry Langdon's unusual comedy is definitely an acquired taste, but one will be richly rewarded for acquiring it. Langdon influenced generations of comedians, from Stan Laurel to more modern comics such as Andy Kaufman and Pee Wee Herman. No other comedian is more deserving of rediscovery and reappraisal. (All tapes available from Grapevine Video, P.O. Box 46161, Phoenix AZ 85063; (602) 245-0210.)

If you want to learn more about Langdon, you can join The Harry Langdon Society, a club devoted to celebrating his art and introducing him to a new generation. The club publishes the quarterly *Wild About Harry!*, and distributes an updated filmography and list of video sources. For information, contact club president Floyd Bennett at The Harry Langdon Society, P.O. Box 388, Downers Grove, IL 60515, or e-mail him at harry_1@ix.netcom.com.

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Linder and Arbuckle on VHS



Max Linder was a Parisian stage actor when he embarked on a film career in 1905; within five years he won international renown, little dreaming

that an English music hall clown would eclipse him in a few short years. Roscoe "Fatty" Arbuckle was traveling the U.S. with a theatrical troupe when he made his movie debut for Selig in 1909; he was already a film veteran by the time that same Englishman entered the scene (he made 35 shorts for Sennett in 1913).

Despite the recent documentary on Linder made by his daughter (*The Man in the Silk Hat*), and the books written on Arbuckle over the years, the accomplishments of these two comedians are still largely obscured by the long shadow of Charles Chaplin. Videobrary's compilations of Linder and Arbuckle short subjects, now available on videocassettes, do not represent either comic at his best, but they provide good introductions to these pioneer laughmakers.

Max Linder (VHS, 50 minutes, \$14.95) includes seven short subjects made between 1906 and 1912. *Max Learns to Skate* and *Max and His Dog* may not have influenced *The Rink* or *A Dog's Life*, but Chaplin's debt to Linder is more than evident. Max's split-second timing, not to mention his dancing ability, were not lost on the heir to his comedic throne.

Roscoe Arbuckle (VHS, 93 minutes, \$14.95) also comprises seven shorts, all made in 1915 and directed by the comedian. He is teamed with Mabel Normand in all but one film. *That Little Band of Gold*, one of the better shorts in the package, features Ford Sterling in an atypical role, as well as Al St. John; Harold Lloyd can be seen in *Miss Fatty's Seaside Lovers*. Arbuckle would go on to more memorable endeavors, but these early efforts are invaluable for their record of his comic development. Now if someone would restore the 1917-1919 Arbuckle-Keaton comedies, not to mention the 1920-22 post-Keaton efforts, it would be a great service to aficionados of silent comedy. (Available from Videobrary, Inc., 5812 Wish Avenue, Encino CA 91316; (818) 881-2640.)

—Jordan R. Young

When Movies Became Talkies

"There is no aspect of film history that has been so slighted." That's Scott Eyman in the prologue of his new book, **The Speed of Sound: Hollywood and the Talkie Revolution 1926-1930** (Simon & Schuster; 413 pages, hardcover; \$30.00). And, indeed, apart from Alexander Walker's 1979 opus *The Shattered Silents*, we really can't think of another book that focuses on the transitional period when the movies became talkies.

As Eyman proves in a narrative that conveys the whole picture through a series of vignettes that are by turns dramatic, poignant and hilarious, "Sound changed everything." From a creative standpoint, the methods of scriptwriting, directing, acting, cinematography and editing underwent complete metamorphoses. (A poetic excerpt from the script for Murnau's silent *Sunrise* is contrasted with the very literal script for a 1929 talkie.) The aesthetics and economics of sound movies changed the kinds of films that would be made. Talkies spelled the end of many studios, and made some minor players into majors. Socially, Hollywood turned from a freewheeling community into a regimented factory town.

As has certainly been noted before, many of the top silent actors were finished virtually overnight; however, Eyman also vividly details the plight of other talented people suddenly cut adrift from the movie business, notably the husband-and-wife title writers H.H. Caldwell and Katherine Hilliker, who went from \$5,000 a month in August 1929 to almost permanent unemployment. Also left out were armies of accompanying musicians who had worked on the set and in theatre orchestras. Eyman notes that the moviegoing experience changed in more personal ways as well; sound films did not allow for subjective interpretation. A gesture might have many meanings, but dialogue "literalized every moment."

It's a bittersweet story, marking the death of one art and the emergence of another. Eyman emphasizes the human interest of it all, but the wonderful anecdotes are backed up with scrupulous documentation (this is a period of movie history heretofore dominated by legend). We could have used more than the handful of photographs, but this superb book is a major contribution to film history as well as being a compelling read.

The Stylish Comedy of Mal St. Clair

For many years, Malcolm St. Clair has been remembered by most as the director of some later, weaker Laurel & Hardy features at 20th Century-Fox. Film historian Willis K. Everson praised him frequently as an American equivalent of Ernst Lubitsch, citing the polish and sophistication of his mid-1920s feature comedies for Paramount. Offsetting that were some highly uncomplimentary comments about St. Clair's abilities, made by his onetime star, the feisty Louise Brooks. St. Clair's prime work is difficult to see (and at least one essential film, the 1926 *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, is now lost).

Ruth Anne Dwyer has thus done a lot of detective work to assemble **Malcolm St. Clair: His Films, 1915-1948** (Scarecrow Press; 296 pages, hardcover; \$42.00). It traces the director's career from his work as an actor-writer-director for Mack Sennett, notes the profound effect that making two shorts with Buster Keaton had upon him, and details his great period at Paramount from 1925 through 1929—when he made sophisticated comedies such as *Are Parents People?* and *A Social Celebrity*. He also made some comedy-drama, applauded for their realism, such as *The Show-Off*. But St. Clair had trouble adapting to sound. His whole style was based on deft nuances, many of them accomplished through innovative camera work and editing—two elements of filmmaking rendered temporarily powerless by bulky early sound-film equipment. St. Clair made a handful of talkies, at age 33 fled to England and then Mexico for a "vacation" which lasted for most of six years. He was installed at 20th Century-Fox in 1936, where he made "B" comedies until 1948.

With so little hard evidence about St. Clair's methods, Dwyer sometimes is forced into conjecture. A more serious problem is that we get hints of St. Clair's skill (such as the scripted description of a celebrated poker-game scene in *The Canary Murder Case*) but Dwyer doesn't always provide the context that would help us appreciate these innovations. St. Clair's talents would have been much better conveyed had the author included more accounts of his great films, rather than giving brief examples of "Hand and Foot" or "Clearly Defined Action." Perhaps not a definitive book on St. Clair, but a welcome step toward a greater rediscovery of his best work. (Available from Scarecrow Press, Boston Way, Lanham MD 20706; (301) 459-3366.)

Stan & Ollie's Co-Stars in the Spotlight

By Chris Seguin

Their faces are familiar to anyone who loves Laurel & Hardy. But it's surprising how little we've really known them ... until now. The stalwart supporting players of the Hal Roach Studios are given a long overdue tribute in a new book by Leo Brooks, **The Laurel & Hardy Stock Company** (103 pages, softcover, \$13.00). This slim but thoughtful and beautifully illustrated book focuses on eight key performers. Chapters on James Finlayson, Charlie Hall, Mae Busch and Anita Garvin are, of course, obvious choices and most welcome by those of us who want to know more about these brilliant performers.

The profiles of prolific character actors Edgar Kennedy and Billy Gilbert might be seen as Brooks taking the easy route by reviewing two already well-documented careers. However, it isn't until reading these chapters that one is reminded of how much Kennedy and Gilbert actually contributed to the boys' films.

A chapter devoted to Rosina Lawrence, (written by her husband and Laurel & Hardy biographer John McCabe) is a baffling inclusion. It's a loving tribute to a lovely woman but (no offense intended to anyone) simply doesn't belong when Thelma Todd, Tiny Sandford, Walter Long and Arthur Housman—each of whom appeared in more films with the boys—only rate a few short paragraphs each.

Most welcome is a well-deserved look at writer/director/performer Charlie Rogers. Long considered nothing more than Stan's favorite "yes man", Rogers' behind-the-scenes role in the making of the films is explored by Brooks, who shows Charlie to have played a far more important part than most Laurel & Hardy fans ever realized.

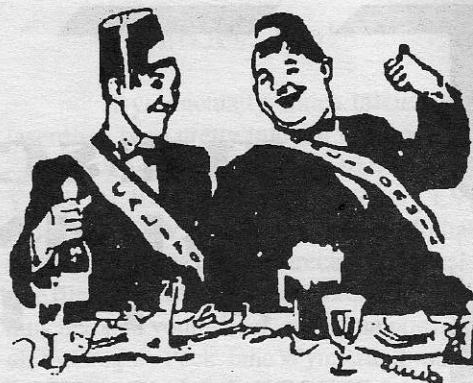
Each bio is accompanied by a complete filmography. Twenty other supporting players are discussed briefly under three categories: "The Other Women", "The Villains and Other Foils" and "The Drunks and Other Men." Most are accompanied by photographs, just in case you weren't quite sure what Sam Lufkin looked like.

Brooks has taken on a huge task and, for the most part, has succeeded. He brings a surprising amount of fresh insight into each performer's work, career, and relationship with Stan and Babe. Early lives and careers are covered in detail but, in some cases, the bios peter out when the affiliation with Laurel & Hardy ends. (No mention is made of Edgar Kennedy's 1943 reunion with Stan and Babe in *Air Raid Wardens* nor the "Wedding Night" radio sketch, nor Charlie Rogers' two-film teaming with Harry Langdon.)

Unfortunately, Brooks is guilty of some (unconscious?) plagiarism from Leonard Maltin's 1973 publication, *The Laurel & Hardy Book*. For example, Maltin writes about Finlayson's funeral: "That occasion was probably the only time that James Finlayson ever made anyone sad." Brooks' version is, "His funeral was probably the only time he ever made anyone sad." Or of Mae Busch's inevitable departure from the Roach lot. Maltin: "...she had to settle for supporting roles in Grade Z dramas. Even this kind of work dried up..." Brooks: "...she had to settle for bit parts and supporting roles in Grade B or worse films. Even this kind of work dried up..." A bit too close for comfort.

There are also errors that a knowledgeable Son of the Desert like Brooks should have avoided. He writes that since Hal Roach's films were distributed by MGM, Roach would have had to enter an agreement with that studio to use Mae Busch in *Love 'em And Weep*. But *Love 'em And Weep* was distributed by Pathé, not MGM. In dismissing Anita Garvin's career claims, Brooks states that she only appeared in two feature films in her entire career. In fact, Anita appeared in two features with Stan and Ollie alone and, according to the filmography provided in this book, thirteen features in total. On top of that, when Anita says that she worked with Alexander Korda, Howard Hawks and Cecil B. De Mille, Brooks says "There is no record of her ever working in films with any of the three" while his filmography puts her in Korda's *The Night Watch*, Hawks' *Trent's Last Case* and De Mille's *Dynamite!* Brooks also makes some erroneous assumptions about Anita's personal and professional relationship with Stan and Babe.

Of course it's easy to dwell on the oversights but much more gratifying to focus on the fascinating details of these lives and of life on the Hal Roach lot. By the end you really feel you know this collection of malevolent landlords, shrewish wives, ornery Scotsmen and slowburning cops as people. *The Laurel & Hardy Stock Company* is a tribute not only to the players' talents, but to their humanity as well. (Available for \$13.00 postpaid from Leo Brooks, 103 North Ave., Apt. 501, Council Bluffs IA 51503.)



L&H's Video Status Not Rosy

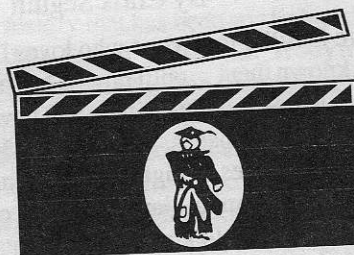
The good news: Laurel & Hardy, the most beloved comedy team in history, are back on home video. The bad news: they're in colorized versions. The three new VHS releases from Cabin Fever Entertainment each combine a feature with a short—**A Chump at Oxford / Helpmates, Block-Heads / The Music Box; Sons of the Desert / Them Thar Hills**. Each tape is in Standard-Play mode and retails for about \$9.99.

Cabin Fever isn't to blame for the quality of the colorization, which varies greatly. The worst offender is *Helpmates*. Colors are either gaudy and ill-chosen or nonexistent. An amusing telephone conversation between the boys has been inexplicably cut. These sins are compounded by the use of a battered 16mm print as the source.

However, *A Chump at Oxford* is from a fine 35mm print with excellent sound; if you turn the color down, it's vastly preferable to the poor-quality B&W version offered on VHS by Video Treasures (which is in the low-quality, slow-speed EP mode and costs as much as Cabin Fever's Standard-Play tape). *Block-Heads* looks okay, as colorized films go, and it's good to have it available at all on VHS, since the Video Treasures folks strangely decided not to release it—and a number of other L&H titles that they've held rights to since 1991.

In 1994, Cabin Fever released a complete series of the Hal Roach Little Rascals talkies, beautifully remastered from complete, pristine black & white 35mm prints. The care taken on that series was justly rewarded by very healthy sales. Oh, if only Cabin Fever, or *somebody*, would do a similar series for Laurel and Hardy; they've only been worldwide favorites for 70 years. (In England, Vision Video has just released the first ten videocassettes of a projected complete L&H series, combining both silents and talkies; the tapes are available in both B&W and colorized versions, mastered from complete, restored prints.)

THE SCARECROW FILMMAKERS S E R I E S



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Edited by Anthony Slide

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Edited by Charles Ziarko

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His Films, 1915-1948

Ruth Anne Dwyer

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Silents Making Noise on Laserdiscs

By Rob Ray

Collectors of vintage films on laserdisc have had a bonanza of new titles to choose from. The following silent films are among those which have recently become available:

Orphans of the Storm (Image Entertainment/Blackhawk Films; ID3689DS, 3 sides, CLV, 32 chapter stops, gatefold jacket, digital sound) Another release from Image and David Shepard is this D.W. Griffith classic starring Lillian and Dorothy Gish about two orphaned sisters who endure many a peril during the time of the French Revolution. As with the recent restoration of *The Phantom of the Opera* (reviewed in *Past Times* #27), the film has been tinted and digitally mastered at the correct speed. A full color facsimile reproduction of the original 16 page souvenir program is also included. A detailed essay by Russell Merritt is contained on the gatefold jacket. The film looks quite nice given its age. The score, originally compiled in 1921, is performed on synthesizer by Brian Benison.



The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse (MGM/UA Home Video; ML104758, 3 sides, CLV, 25 chapter stops, digital sound) The film that made Rudolph Valentino a star in 1921 has always been rough going for me. However, this adaptation of Blasco Ibanez' novel about brothers who fight on opposing sides during the Great War finally comes to life in this new transfer from MGM/UA. The print, compiled from what looks like at least four different sources (particularly in the frequently excerpted tango scene) is very clean for its age. Though the none-too-subtle symbolism dates badly, director Rex Ingram's imaginative use of the camera holds your interest and Carl Davis' lush score is magnificent.

Show People (MGM/UA Home Video - ML101539, 2 sides, Side 1 in CLV, side 2 in CAV, 16 chapter stops, digital sound) Long available on VHS tape, this LD release is worth the wait for silent comedy fans. A much sharper print and the original synchronized score has been used for this laserdisc release. The VHS tape has a new score by Carl Davis, which, while excellent, sounds pompous and not nearly as much fun as the original. Marion Davies had a great flair for comedy that was all too often submerged in those costume epics which William Randolph Hearst was so fond of. Here she is little Peggy Pepper, fresh from her plantation in Georgia, who is determined to become a star in 1928 Hollywood. The story, loosely suggested by Gloria Swanson's career, has fellow actor William Haines getting her in at a studio making slapstick films. Soon, she graduates to more serious endeavors, becomes engaged to a phony French count and lords it over the people who gave her a start, until she gets her commupance in the final reel. Lots of silent stars make cameos as themselves, including Marion Davies, in a brief, funny bit.

Sally of the Sawdust (Image Entertainment/Blackhawk Films; ID3690DS, 2 sides, CLV, 27 chapter stops, digital sound) W.C. Fields' best known silent feature is an adaptation of his 1923-24 stage success *Poppy*, under which title it would be re-filmed in 1936. This tale of a sideshow con-man whose ward (Carole Dempster) is actually the daughter of a wealthy couple, still has enough Fieldsian comedy to offset D.W. Griffith's sentimentalism. The print used for this David Shepard restoration is sharp; the musical score, adapted from the original 1925 cue sheets, is performed on synthesizer by Philip Carli.

Harry Langdon: The Forgotten Clown (Image ID3152KN; \$99.98) In this three-disc box set, Langdon's peak 1924-27 period is represented by three feature films made by Langdon's own company and three shorts produced by Mack Sennett. *The Strong Man* casts him as a Belgian who joins a touring weightlifter in order to visit his pen-pal girlfriend in the States. *Tramp, Tramp, Tramp* has Harry entering a country-wide walking marathon to win a girl (Joan Crawford). *Long Pants* is an oddity in which Langdon is tempted by a vamp. The first two features are in excellent quality, beautifully sharp and clear; *Long Pants* is slightly washed-out in spots but certainly watchable. The shorts are not as sharp pictorially, but are certainly fun: *His Marriage Wow* depicts Harry's difficulties in tying the knot; *All Night Long* is a WWI epic; and *Saturday Afternoon* is a gem in which Harry sneaks away from his domineering wife. All of the films have new synthesized musical scores which are generally quite good. (Available from retail outlets or by mail from Ken Crane's LaserDisc, 15251 Beach Blvd., Westminster CA 92683; (800) 624-3078.)

Talkies, Too!

If you actually watch talkies, the laserdiscs been pretty juicy of late, too.

The Yearling (MGM/UA Home Video; ML105862, 3 sides, 2 sides in CLV, Side 3 in CAV, 29 chapter stops, digital sound) Clarence Brown directed this sensitive film about a boy who grows emotionally attached to a young deer, with fine portrayals by Gregory Peck, Jane Wyman and young Claude Jarman, Jr., who won a special Oscar for his work. MGM/UA has remastered this title from a fresh print off the Technicolor negative. The earlier disc looked nice, but this new transfer is beautiful, showing why the cinematography (the film was shot on location in Florida) was worthy of its Oscar. Side Three has been mastered in the full-feature CAV format and contains the theatrical trailer.

On Approval (Image Entertainment/Blackhawk Films; ID3748DS, 2 sides, CLV, 21 chapter stops, digital sound) Often seen in horrible prints on cable and public television, this sparkling British comedy is certainly Bea Lillie's finest film of the sound era, rivaled only by her silent *Exit Smiling*. Co-star Clive Brook produced, directed and co-wrote this 1943 adaption of Frederick Lonsdale's play about a trial marriage on a remote island in the 1890s. Blackhawk Films has digitally mastered the film from a superior 35mm nitrate fine grain print.

Captain From Castile (20th Century Fox Home Entertainment; 0898080, 3 sides, CLV, 34 chapter stops, digital sound) Fox has finally released this 1947 Tyrone Power epic set against Cortez' invasion of Mexico. The 141 minute film was an ambitious production in its day, featuring extensive Technicolor location shooting in Mexico and a classic score by Alfred Newman. The audio and video transfer quality is fine.

Of Mice and Men (Image Entertainment/Corinth Films - ID3787CO, 2 sides, CLV, 26 chapter stops, digital sound) Hal Roach made a rare departure from his usual comedy fare in 1939 with this fine adaptation of the play based on John Steinbeck's novel of two migrant workers in California's San Joaquin Valley during the Depression. Burgess Meredith is fine as George and Lon Chaney gave the performance of his career as the simple-minded Lenny, who doesn't know his own strength. The source material looks fine for its age and the sound, while unusually bright and crisp throughout, does change timbre from reel to reel.

Anecdotes and Advice from the Great Directors

Most of the directors of the '30s and '40s or before are gone now, but thankfully before they went a few wise souls ensured that their comments about their craft were preserved. Chief among these souls was Peter Bogdanovich, who, before he embarked on a directing career, wrote prolifically about movies; he also organized festivals to bring vintage films back into view. His love for films from the silent era through the '40s permeated his style as a director (notably in *What's Up, Doc?* and *Paper Moon*), but even after finding success in Hollywood he continued to document the thoughts of the old masters.

Sixteen directors share their views and anecdotes with Bogdanovich in **Who the Devil Made It?** (Alfred A. Knopf; 849 pages, hardcover; \$39.95). They range from pioneer Alan Dwan, who began making films in 1909, to Sidney Lumet, a film director since 1957 who is still active. Some of the pieces are lengthy (particularly those on Dwan, Alfred Hitchcock, Fritz Lang and Howard Hawks); others, such as the Frank Tashlin and Josef Von Sternberg pieces, are very brief, just enough to give you a flavor of the people who made the films.

Since each of these filmmakers put his personal stamp on his pictures, it follows that these are sixteen very forceful personalities. Howard Hawks is plain-spoken, unemotional, a thorough professional. Raoul Walsh is gregarious, full of the devil. Fritz Lang is precise and analytical; Joseph H. Lewis happily recalls learning his craft on cheapies at Republic and Universal. The memories of Leo McCarey—whose only post-career interview this seems to be, conducted in his hospital room eight months before his death from emphysema—are wonderfully funny but often inaccurate. His responses are often terse—and very opinionated. (On Harold Lloyd: "He was a great judge of comedy values...he just couldn't act a lick.") All offer their wise counsel on the art of making movies.

This book is full of revelations (one being that Hawks' preferred cut of *Red River* is the shorter one with Walter Brennan's narration). Bogdanovich has blessed us by preserving these priceless recollections of men who created an art form. With the scant respect paid their films these days, we can only hope that future filmmakers will have the good sense to read this book and heed its plentiful advice. (Available in bookstores.)



Such witticisms are among the many highlights of **Wilder Times** by Kevin Lally (Henry Holt and Co; 496 pages, hardcover; \$30.00), a warm and perceptive biography of the director that also functions well as a history and analysis of his films. Wilder cooperated with Mr. Lally, and his frequent comments add many insights about the films and the man.

Some anecdotes about the production of Wilder's classics are familiar; More absorbing is the account of Wilder's career as a writer for Germany's UFA studio in 1931-32, his escape to Paris (where he made his first film as director, *Mauvaise Graine*), and his arrival in Hollywood as a screenwriter who couldn't yet speak English (he learned by reading novels and listening to radio soap operas). His first American writing credit was *Music in the Air*, based on a Kern-Hammerstein operetta and starring Gloria Swanson, with whom he'd work again 16 years later.

He found his niche in 1937 when assigned to *Bluebeard's Eighth Wife*, where Wilder gained an ideal writing partner, Charles Brackett, and learned about direction under the tutelage of his idol, Ernst Lubitsch. (The trio worked together again at MGM on *Ninotchka*.) Lally notes the importance of such less-remembered Wilder scripts as *Arise, My Love* and *Hold Back the Dawn* in forming the style that would mark later successes such as *Ball of Fire* and Wilder's self-directed *The Major and the Minor*, *The Lost Weekend* and *Double Indemnity*. Thoroughly researched, well-written, consistently entertaining and insightful, this is Lally's first book; we look forward to more. (Available in bookstores.)

An Illuminating Study of George Hurrell

Remember when a publicity portrait could make or break an actor? Long ago, when studios had stars under contract and still cared what publicity photos looked like — before the 35mm hit-and-run method caught on — George Hurrell's Rembrandtesque lighting and dramatic poses shaped the careers of stars such as Gable and Crawford, and coaxed every ounce of oomph from the likes of Harlow.

Thanks to still collector Bill Chapman, the pre-eminent studio portrait photographer whose oeuvre survived the wholesale disposal of studio archives back in the '60s and '70s. The result is **Hurrell's Hollywood Portraits: The Chapman Collection** by Mark A. Vieira (Abrams; 224 pages, hardcover; \$39.95), a handsome volume that allows us to rediscover how Hurrell (1904-1992) perfected and popularized the glamour portrait in cinema's golden age, and made icons out of the sometimes less than beautiful people in front of the lens. Vieira, who adopted Hurrell's techniques and claims to be the only one in the U.S. using them today, describes how the master portraitist lit and retouched his large-format photographs and analyzes their vast impact. The 275 illustrations are beautifully reproduced.

Still available is a 1991 collection, **The Portfolios of George Hurrell** (Grayston Books; 96 pages, hardcover; \$75.00). It's a slender yet oversized volume, with 3 breathtaking Hurrell portraits of Harlow, Garbo et al reproduced in a full-sized 11x14 format. The text (an introduction by George Christy and an essay by Gene Thornton) is minimal, but you can feast your eyes on the '30s-era portraits for hours.

Both books are available through the internet via a terrific website called **The Hollywood Photography of George Hurrell** (<http://www.hurrellphotography.com/hurrellindex.html>), which also offers posters and downloadable graphics, as well as a concise biography of the photographer.

Old Films Score: Cinecon 33, Cinesation 8

Cinecon, the annual bash held by the Society for Cinephiles, makes its 33rd appearance this Labor Day weekend, August 28 through September 1. In years past, the film festival has been held at the venerable Hollywood Roosevelt hotel, but this year it's moving to the Red Lion Hotel in nearby Glendale. (It may not have the mystique of the Roosevelt, but it'll have air conditioning!) Screenings will be in 16mm at the Red Lion, with the beautiful Alex Theatre, built in 1925, serving as the locale for 35mm screenings.

The film program this year continues the Cinecon tradition of rare, scarce, never-thought-you'd-see-'em titles. As always, the film program continues to evolve right up until showtime, but confirmed films thus far include a bevy of silents, including *So This is Love*, a 1928 Columbia feature directed by Frank Capra; *The Mirror*, a long-lost Mary Pickford one-reeler from 1911; *Wild Bill Hickok*, a William S. Hart feature virtually unseen since its 1923 release; and *Letters of Fire*, a 1919 western starring a gal who'd become better known as Queen of the Nightclubs, Texas Guinan ("Hello, suckers!").



Talkies are represented, too, with the notorious *His Glorious Night* (1929), fabled as the film which finished the career of romantic idol John Gilbert. (Was his voice really high and squeaky? We'll find out.) Jessie Matthews and Edmund Gwenn star in *The Good Companions*, made in England in 1933, while a just-before-stardom Jean Arthur heads the cast of *Public Menace*, made for Columbia in 1935. Among the 35mm screenings are *By the Law*, a Soviet film directed by Lev Kuleshov in 1926; *Atlantis*, a 1913 Danish epic; and Mary Pickford's 1918 feature *Amarilly of Clothes-Line Alley*, directed by Marshall Neilan.

Cinecon is more than screenings; it's also marked by special presentations and guests. The Vitagraph Company's 100th anniversary will be commemorated; the lesser-remembered Balboa Studio, a center of film-making in Long Beach, California, will also be saluted. Guests include Virginia Grey, Patty Andrews of the Andrews Sisters, June Havoc, director Vincent Sherman, Marsha Hunt, Kathryn Grayson, Gloria Jean and two child stars of the silent era, Baby Marie

Osborne and Diana Serra Cary ("Baby Peggy"). Naturally, there'll be a dealers' room, loaded with posters, stills and other memorabilia for sale.

Registration for Cinecon 33 is \$100.00 per person, including the Saturday banquet; without the banquet, it's \$60 per person. For further information, write to Cinecon, Inc., P.O. Box 418, Rancho Mirage CA 92270, or contact Marcus Skiles at (818) 973-2209, or by e-mail at marcusii@earthlink.net. You can also obtain full information at the Cinecon website: <http://www.mdle.com/ClassicFilms/Cinecon/33/>

Less than a month later, you can enjoy another filmic feast at the 8th Annual Fall Cinesation. Screenings will be held in Saginaw, Michigan's historic Temple Theater from September 26th through the 28th, with live pipe organ accompaniment.

Among the rarities scheduled to be screened: a 35mm print of *The Golem* (1920) one of the most important early horror films; *Stark Love*, a 1927 Paramount feature directed by Griffith cameraman Karl Brown and shot on location in North Carolina's Smoky Mountains; a rare 35mm nitrate IB Technicolor print of *The Blue Bird* (1940), with Shirley Temple, Spring Byington and Nigel Bruce; and a German feature from 1918, *When I Was Dead*, directed by and starring Ernst Lubitsch in one of the few surviving examples of his work as an actor.

Other goodies on the bill include silent nitrate Felix the Cat cartoons, fragments of otherwise lost films; and many serials and shorts, some in IB Technicolor or CinemaScope. Guests include archivists James Cozart from the Library of Congress, and D.J. Turner from the Canadian National Archives. For more information, write to Cinesation, Box 352, Frankenmuth MI 48734 or call Terry Hoover at (810) 471-1809 or Dennis Atkinson at (517) 652-8881. You can also contact the organizers by e-mail: Cinesation@aol.com.

Noir in a Nutshell on Rhino/TCM CD

If you're a fan of film noir, you can revisit 18 of the finest movies in that genre through *Murder is My Beat: Classic Film Noir Themes and Scenes* (Rhino/TCM R2 72466; \$15.98). This CD is an interesting throwback not only to the '40s, but to the 1970s—it's the kind of album they used to make in the days before home video. Back then, being able to play actual dialogue from old movies on your phonograph was a kick, but now that you can buy or rent the whole movie whenever you want, well, the thrill is somewhat lessened. The track listing on the back of the jewel box doesn't quite make it clear that this disc also includes dialogue from the soundtracks; at first it looks like a collection of original scores.

Eighteen films are excerpted in a CD which runs about 58 minutes. In most cases you hear the main title, then a few snippets of dialogue. One should be very familiar with these films for the maximum effect. We found the edited versions of scenes to be a little too concise for their own good. For example, the great soliloquy delivered by "the Major" in *The Big Sleep* is whittled down to one or two lines. The collection succeeds mainly in prompting memories of these films—but if you haven't seen them, it might be confusing.

The sound quality is quite good although there's a little optical-track fuzz. The films chosen are mainly from Warner Bros., but the producers' desire for completeness necessitates several from RKO, a couple of MGMs, and even *Laura* courtesy of Fox (there's no dialogue, but David Raksin's gorgeous main theme is sufficient). The scenes chosen are all key scenes, but since the collection could have run another fifteen minutes, the producers could have given another minute apiece to each film. As it is, the package works best as a supplement for those familiar with the world of film noir.

The booklet—lavishly illustrated with poster art and stills—includes a great essay by Ian Whitcomb with lengthy quotes from Herbert Kronke, a writer during the golden age. A note on film noir music includes commentary from David Raksin about the genre and its practitioners, notably Miklos Rosza. Basic credits for each of the eighteen films is included, and a track listing provides the recording dates when known, composer, and titles of themes heard here. (Available from Rhino Direct, 1-800-432-0020.)

100 Years of Frank Capra

Continued from Page 1

dramatic and definitely was intended to send an optimistic message to a nervous public.

A note about *Lost Horizon*: This edition is the UCLA restoration, with about six minutes of no-longer-extant footage replaced by stills from the missing scenes. At least, this is what you're *supposed* to get—we opened a brand-new "Centennial Collection" edition of it, put it on our VCR—and saw the 1973 color, widescreen musical remake starring Peter Finch suddenly gamboling across our TV. Replacement copies are making their way to retailers, but caveat emptor.

Each videocassette retails for \$19.95. Along with the eight vintage Capra features, Columbia Tri-Star has also made available *Frank Capra's American Dream*, a new feature-length documentary hosted by Ron Howard. It includes new interviews with some of the director's associates, among them sound man Edward Bernds and actress Fay Wray, who makes a good case for the creative contributions of her late husband, screenwriter Robert Riskin. Peter Falk recalls working with Capra on the director's last film, *A Pocketful of Miracles*. Contemporary directors Martin Scorsese and Oliver Stone sing the praises of Capra, leaving us to wonder why they've failed to emulate him, since their own excessively violent, downbeat and unpleasant films have not a whit of the Capra style or spirit.

Some of the post-Columbia releases such as *Riding High* and *A Hole in the Head* are represented only by their trailers (which are public-domain and thus can be used without fee). However, there are some sequences from *It's a Wonderful Life* (the copyright status of which is debatable).

The 1927-39 Columbia period is very thoroughly covered, with generous clips from all of the existing films, including rarities such as *Dirigible*, *Submarine* and the newly-rediscovered silent *The Matinee Idol*. All of the clips are in beautiful condition, surprisingly so for *It Happened One Night*.

The documentary retails separately for \$19.95; it can be also purchased as part of a three-cassette Capra Centennial Collection package, which also includes *You Can't Take it With You* and *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town*. The three-video set retails for \$39.95, meaning that you're essentially getting one tape for free. (Available from retailers and mail-order sources such as Movies Unlimited, 1-800-4-MOVIES.)



Mr. Benchley's Frustrations

Robert Benchley once assessed his talents this way to his friend Harold Ross, the editor of *The New Yorker*: "I am not a writer and not an actor. I don't know what I am." Maybe Benchley wasn't a writer or actor in any conventional sense, but he had a most ingratiating personality and a genius for detailing life's embarrassing little moments. His writing and acting was so deft that he left behind twelve books (with seven more collections published posthumously),

49 short films, 38 features, thousands of drama reviews and hundreds of radio programs.

The life of this eloquent Everyman is beautifully rendered in *Laughter's Gentle Soul* by Billy Altman (Norton; 382 pages, hardcover; \$30.00). If one word could describe Benchley's humor, I think it would be empathy: among the magazine pieces which helped build his reputation were "Coffee, Megg and Ilk, Please," the interior dialogue of a nervous man at a lunch counter; and "Call for Mr. Kenworthy," in which he sympathetically describes a hotel bellboy's futile attempts to find the men he's paging. (Benchley could sometimes he could be a harsh critic—notably about the hit play *Abie's Irish Rose*, which Benchley felt was "teeming with racial hatred and intolerance.") Benchley's humor, in print or in performance, was almost entirely based on delicate nuances; it seemed light and airy even though it was chronicling our shared fears and frustrations.

Altman fully captures Benchley's colorful life—which included many a lunch with the wits at the Algonquin Round Table, writing for *The New Yorker*, reviewing every new play during Broadway's halcyon days, and becoming a popular author and film actor. His doubts about his abilities, his frustrations over not being a more serious writer and his fondness for alcohol kept Benchley's life from being a total joy, however, and Altman sensitively describes the defeats and bafflements which gave his humor its resonance.

The Commerce of Cartoons



In the last ten years or so, animation has gone from being the unwanted orphan of film scholarship to the favorite son. Way back in 1975, Joe Adamson's book *Tex Avery: The King of Cartoons* sat shivering all alone on bookstore shelves (and not for long, since its publisher went under). Leslie Cabarga brought out a self-published history of the Fleischer studio around the same time. Leonard Maltin then brought forth *Of Mice and Magic* in 1980, with Jeff Lenburg's

Encyclopedia of Animated Cartoon Series first showing up in '81. And then—not much

Conventional wisdom of publishers was that if a cartoon book wasn't about Disney characters, it wouldn't sell. Little did they reckon with a public who'd grown up not just with Disney 'toons, but with Looney Tunes: when Steve Schneider's *That's All, Folks!* hit the market in '88, the dam burst, and in rapid succession we had books about Bugs Bunny, Tweety and Sylvester, Tom & Jerry, Felix; new books about Disney, Avery, Hanna-Barbera, Freleng, Mel Blanc; books by and about Chuck Jones; and several histories of the whole animated shebang, notably Charles Solomon's *Enchanted Drawings*.

Former Time editor Stefan Kanfer says in the preface to his *Serious Business* (Scribner; 256 pages, hardcover; \$27.50) that his book "is not an attempt to replace the work that has gone before, but an attempt to augment it." It does—sort of. To truly augment the many volumes on animation that have come before, this book needs a fresh angle, and the subtitle hints at one: "The Art and Commerce of Animation in America." A book which details how animation was affected by product licensing, budget limitations, labor union censorship, the Blacklist, demographics, new media and world events would make for absorbing reading, and Kanfer does touch on these issues. Unfortunately, these elements are obscured when combined with an overall history which covers everything from J. Stuart Blackton's chalkboard animations to Disney's *Hunchback*.

While it's deftly written and, at 256 pages, certainly briskly paced, a lot of the *Business* seems familiar, particularly when there are lengthy quotes from earlier books. And there are a few errors: *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* was released on December 21, 1937, not in 1939. A handful of illustrations, twelve in color, supplement this interesting but not definitive history. (Available in bookstores.)

Music

Grier at the Grove

Of the bands that held court at the Cocoanut Grove—the posh nightclub located inside Los Angeles' Ambassador Hotel—Jimmie Grier's tenure was the briefest, last for only a few months in 1932. Even though he didn't last as long at the Grove as his predecessor Gus Arnheim or his successor Phil Harris, Grier led a band that was polished, lively and very popular with the Hollywood crowd. (After Grier left the Grove, he went over to the Biltmore Bowl, which became his home base for the better part of a decade.)

Grier became a fairly prolific recording artist for Brunswick starting in 1933, but his band was primarily an accompaniment to vocalists such as Bing Crosby or Dick Powell. Thus, it's doubly welcome to hear the band take center stage on the new CD **Jimmie Grier—Echoes from the Cocoanut Grove** (Take Two TT421CD; \$15.98).

The band had that bouncy, jazz inflected "West Coast" sound of the early '30s, but the addition of an accordion and an expanded string section made it a bit sweeter than Arnheim's band, for which Grier had written the arrangements. Grier evidently enjoyed vocalists, since he had a platoon of them; you'll hear refrains by Donald Novis, Loyce Whiteman, Dick Webster, Margaret Lawrence and the Three Ambassadors (one of whom, Jack Smith, later had a successful solo career, and who contributes some anecdotes in the booklet essay). The tunes range from bouncy ("Bend Down Sister," "Sugar," "Ooh, That Kiss," "What Did You Do With It?") to romantic ("Music in the Moonlight," "Stardust") but the emphasis is on uptempo numbers. Taken from rare 1932 broadcast transcriptions, all 20 tracks have sparkling sound quality. (Available from Take Two Records, P.O. Box 36729, Los Angeles CA 90036; (213) 939-4419.)

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Lovely Tones by Isham Jones

Isham Jones may not have been a very personable bandleader; balding and plain-looking, he had a stern visage which made him look (in the words of historian George T. Simon) "more like a strict manual arts teacher." Further, he was so sensitive about his pock-marked face that he usually kept his back turned to the dancing throng, and concentrated on conducting his men. His public didn't seem to mind: the band's full, richly textured sound overcame any visual deficiencies.

Jones had had an early peak of popularity from 1921-1925, when he made many best-selling records for Brunswick (old copies *still* turn up frequently) and wrote hit songs such as "On the Alamo," "Spain," "I'll See You in My Dreams" "It Had to Be You" and "The One I Love Belongs to Somebody Else." All of these were massive hits and earned Jones a very comfortable income apart from bandleading. Not surprisingly, Jones disbanded in 1926 to concentrate on songwriting. He continued to record and play some engagements, but generally used freelancers.

By the fall of 1929, Jones had a hankering to lead a real band again. A Twin Cities band, the Marigold Entertainers, caught the ear of band booker Verne Stevens, who thought these eager youngsters could handle Jones' richly textured arrangements. Jones came to hear the group in Detroit—and became their new leader a week later. The nucleus of this band remained with Jones for the next five years.

Ironically, although Jones had already achieved enough success to live comfortably, he was just embarking on what would truly be his golden age. The records from October 1929 to February 1936 are models of creative arranging (Many of the charts were written by the band's pianist, James "Jiggs" Noble, and starting in 1931 the majority were by young Gordon Jenkins). The deeper-than-usual tone of the band (achieved with an emphasis on trombones over trumpets, and a tuba playing in the brass section while a string bass kept the rhythm going) still sounds fresh and modern.

The first stirrings of Jones' golden era have been recaptured in **Isham Jones: The Classic Years Volume One 1929-31** (Parklane PL101; \$12.99). The 24 tracks start with the recording debut of Jones' new band and continue through March 1931, by which time it had gained more poise and maturity. The Jones band excelled on romantic ballads such as "Song of the Blues" and "I Keep Remembering," creating a lovely mood without ever becoming sticky-sweet. The most famous ballad in the bunch is Jones' landmark recording of "Star Dust" from May 13, 1930, the first time that Hoagy Carmichael's uptempo composition from 1927 had been arranged as a slow number. The success of Jones' record proved that the public preferred it that way.

Since Jones' band isn't thought of as a primarily hot unit, it's surprising to hear so many uptempo numbers here—"Sweet Jennie Lee," "You Don't Know What You're Doin'," "Not a Cloud in the Sky," "My Baby Just Cares For Me" and other Depression-beaters exemplify that wonderful bouncy early '30s sound, yet still having the darker, richer tone that was Jones' trademark. Vocals on some of the uptempo numbers are by Eddie Stone, whose extroverted-vaudevillian style is fun. Although the booklet indicates that some of the vocals might be by Billy Scott, all of them sound like smooth Frank Sylvano.

Not all of Jones' records from the period are included here (among the missing are "Nina Rosa" and "Trees"), but it's a pleasure to have these titles available on CD even if the collection isn't quite complete. Two happy surprises are the instrumental versions of "Sweet Jennie Lee" and "I'm So Afraid of You" made for Spanish export, with instrumental passages replacing the vocals; the domestic versions are here, too. The original 78s used are in excellent condition, with only "Lonesome Lover" and "You're Just a Dream Come True" exhibiting mild surface noise. The transfers by Roger Robles are wonderfully rich, especially impressive since Brunswicks of this period usually sound rather thin. (Available for \$12.99 plus 3.00 shipping and handling from K.H.S. Music, P.O. Box 790077, Middle Village NY 11379.)



Trumbauer: Out of Bix's Shadow

In PT #27, we reviewed three new CDs of recordings made in the '20s and early '30s by Frank Trumbauer, a highly influential musician who made an instantly identifiable sound on the somewhat quirky c-melody saxophone. We're pleased to report that a definitive biography published in 1994 is still very much available—**Tram: The Frank Trumbauer Story** by Philip R. Evans and Larry F. Kiner with William Trumbauer (Scarecrow Press; 822 pages, hardcover; \$83.50).

Evans is well known as a tireless researcher of vintage jazz and its practitioners, and his exhaustive work shows on every page. With remarkable detail, the era of the '20s dance bands comes alive again, with accounts of Tram's colorful life on the bandstand with Paul Whiteman, Joe Venuti, Jack Teagarden and most of all, Bix Beiderbecke—about whom there's a surprising amount of material not used in Evans' *Bix: Man and Legend*. Although he's been gone since 1956, Trumbauer gives his own perspective here, thanks to copious quotes from diaries, letters and interviews supplied by his daughter, Lynne. His later years, spent largely in aviation, and his devotion to his family are also chronicled.

The book is not much concerned with explaining why Trumbauer was considered a great musician, and contains little analysis or assessment of his recorded work. The discography is minutely detailed, its only significant flaw being that the discs are listed alphabetically, by artist name—thus a 1924 session by the Arkansas Travelers is followed by a Benson Orchestra of Chicago date from 1923. (A lengthy chronology does repair some of the damage by listing the session dates in order.) You may not learn in these pages why Trumbauer was unique, but if you're already an admirer of his you'll find this labor of love indispensable. (Available from Scarecrow Press, 4720 Boston Way, Lanham MD 20706.)

A Lifelike Interpretation of Jelly's Rolls

From 1924 to 1926, Jelly Roll Morton made a series of piano rolls for Vocalstyle, Capitol and QRS. Because the talented pianist had a true jazzman's spirit, he never played his compositions exactly the same way twice—each performance had nuances slightly different from the others. This makes a new CD, **Jelly Roll Morton: The Piano Solos** (Nonesuch 79363-2; \$16.99) particularly important. As with two recent CDs of George Gershwin rolls, the Morton rolls have been "realized" by musical preservationist Artis Wodehouse, undergoing a computerized process which introduces crescendos, diminuendos, and other dynamics of human performance which a roll cannot normally replicate.

We compared this disc to an earlier CD that uses the same rolls on a conventional player piano, *Jelly Roll Morton: Blues and Stomps from Rare Piano Rolls* (Biograph BCD 111), which we reviewed in PT #7. The performances in the new Nonesuch CD have much more expression, but the recording quality doesn't have as much presence. It truly sounds like Jelly playing these pieces, with the mechanical quality of a player piano removed. The new tracks were recorded at the Academy of Arts and Letters in New York City; unfortunately, it sounds as though the microphones were placed somewhere in the middle of the auditorium. The reverberation of the hall obscures a few of the finer nuances.

The Nonesuch has the 12 existing rolls which were played by Morton; all are his compositions with the exception of "Sweet Man," a pop tune of 1925. Evidently four other Morton rolls were published but no longer exist. (The Biograph CD also includes "Pep" and "The Naked Dance," two rolls created in the early '80s approximating Morton's style.) The tempo of the performances can vary greatly; for example, "Dead Man Blues" runs 3:59 on the Biograph CD, but it's been pumped at a slower pace for the Nonesuch, where it lasts for 4:47. Most of the performances, however, vary by only a few seconds.

In sum, the Biograph CD has much more presence, but sounds like a player piano—which might well be the sound desired by some listeners. The new Nonesuch CD sounds remarkably like Morton himself playing a live concert as recorded digitally, but distantly. As with the two CDs of the James Reese Europe band which we reviewed in PT #26, these are two worthy but different interpretations of the same material. (Both CDs are available in retail stores or by mail from Worlds Records, P.O. Box 1922, Novato CA 94948.)

Louis Meets Leo

Louis Armstrong had a prolific film career, including five MGM features. Happily, he made enough music in that quintet of films to fill a CD—which has just been released as **Now You Has Jazz: Louis Armstrong at MGM** (Rhino/TCM R2 72827; \$15.98). Producers George Feltenstein and Bradley Flanagan have excavated several complete performances used only partially in the films; five of the 25 tracks are outtakes heard here for the first time.

Louis' first appearance for MGM, in the lavish 1943 musical *Cabin in the Sky*, was little other than a cameo—but from the cutting room floor comes the previously unreleased "Ain' it the Truth," a sly number with Louis as Lucifer that's the opposite of his spirituals such as "Shadrack." Which, conveniently, is combined with "When the Saints Go Marchin' In" in one of eleven tracks made for *The Strip* (1951), a gritty drama starring Mickey Rooney. By this time, Louis had formed his All-Stars combo; the group heard here lives up to its billing, with Jack Teagarden, Earl Hines, Barney Bigard, Arvell Shaw and Cozy Cole lending support. Armstrong fans will be grateful for "I'm Coming, Virginia" and "One O'Clock Jump," otherwise unrecorded by Louis, whom we suspect was grateful in turn for being introduced to "A Kiss to Build a Dream On." Written by Bert Kalmar, Harry Ruby and Oscar Hammerstein II for *A Night at the Opera* but shelved by MGM, the studio gave it to Pops for this film, and it became a key part of his repertoire.

The All-Stars were back the next year for *Glory Alley*, a boxing drama set in New Orleans and starring Ralph Meeker and Leslie Caron (!). Naturally, there are some authentic Crescent City anthems such as "Flee As a Bird" and "Oh, Didn't He Ramble," but the most unusual (and unused) track from the film is Satch's lilting rendition of "It's a Most Unusual Day."

The tracks from *High Society* are familiar but welcome, especially those with Bing Crosby along for the ride; the two numbers from *When the Boys Meet the Girls* include an Armstrong original, "Throw it Out of Your Mind." Thirteen tracks are in stereo; there's some slight surface noise on the selections from *The Strip*, but the others are in the highest of fi. Will Friedwald's well-researched and insightful liner notes are a bonus. (Available from Rhino Direct, 1-800-432-0020.)

Jazz Portraits in Prose

It's a formidable challenge to write a review of anything by Whitney Balliett, who has been *The New Yorker's* jazz critic for some forty years. **American Musicians II: Seventy-One Portraits in Jazz** (Oxford University Press; 520 pages, hardcover; \$39.95) is a delight, a gallery of graceful sketches of great jazz artists. They run the gamut from King Oliver to the avant-garde pianist Cecil Taylor, but a majority of the pieces focus on early-era greats such as Benny Goodman, Sidney Bechet, Fats Waller, Jack Teagarden et al.

While Balliett's thorough knowledge of the whole world of jazz comes through forcefully on each page, this is in no way stuffy or pedantic. It's not a dry recitation of each musician's career, and it's not a windy analysis of how bar three of a solo differs from take three to take seven. Each essay is truly a portrait—getting into the essence of the musician's personality as conveyed through his or her music, and as described by compatriots.

Especially colorful is the portrait of the late cornetist Jimmy McPartland, who talks about his old pal Bix Beiderbecke, his own troubles with alcohol, his best friend and ex-wife, pianist Marian McPartland ("I suggest that all married people get divorced and begin treating each other like human beings") and what goes through his mind when he's playing: "Whatever emotions you have that day go right to the edge, and then come out. You forget about yourself, because you're too busy treating the other musicians like gentlemen and artists, which they are. Nothing goes through my mind except the melody, which I keep at the back...it's a lovely and gratifying experience."

Also lovely and gratifying is the beautiful, delicate piece on Jelly Roll Morton, and the profile of trumpeter Jabbo Smith: "His speech rises and falls rapidly, and some of his sentences are opaque: the words move by without pause, and meaning goes under. He has a rapid, jouncing laugh. The cocksure twenty-year-old trumpet player who set out to dethrone Louis Armstrong is no longer visible, but now and then he peers out from behind the blinds." Most of the elder statesmen are gone now, but Balliett's graceful prose preserves them fully-formed, all their humanity and lovely idiosyncracies intact. (Oxford University Press, 198 Madison Avenue, New York NY 10016.)

Vocalists New and Old

Sultry, Swinging Lavay Smith

At *Past Times*, we focus primarily on performers on the past, but we have an obligation to note current performers who carry on with musical traditions. If you enjoy the bluesy big-band music of the mid-'40s—made just before the Rhythm & Blues boom—you'll enjoy a recent CD, **Lavay Smith and her Red Hot Skillet Lickers: One Hour Mama** (Fat Note Records FN0001). Ms. Smith is a chanteuse whose primary influences are great jazz and R&B singers of the past—Dinah Washington, Bessie Smith, Anita O'Day, Alberta Hunter, Ida Cox et al. She's a smooth singer rather than a shouter, and she definitely knows that you can accomplish more by doing less. Her restraint (in an era dominated by shriekers such as Dianne Schuur or Jennifer Holiday) is a welcome relief.

The band, eight men strong, is tight without being so precise that they don't swing. And swing they do! They have respect for the great jazzmen of the past (Basie in particular) but they don't treat these numbers as museum pieces. The charts by pianist Chris Siebert make the eight men sound like a much bigger band. (There are three reeds, a trombone, guitar, string bass, piano and drums—but no trumpet, surprisingly.) Many of the arrangements are creative reworkings of earlier charts—for example, "Blue Skies" is a combination of the Duke Ellington version from 1943 and the Dinah Washington 1954 outing.

Although there's definitely an emphasis on bluesy material, Smith and the Skillet Lickers acquit themselves well on more pop-oriented tunes ("Blue Skies," "Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea"). On some tracks it would've been nice to hear more of her, but the musicians cook so well that we don't mind the generous space given to them. "Walk Right In, Walk Right Out" is unexpectedly raunchy (it comes *this* close to warranting a Parental Advisory warning, without really saying any of those words) and is the one rather grimy element in an otherwise classy package. (Available from Fat Note Records, 30 Glover Street, San Francisco CA 94109; (415) 771-2218.)



Innocent Annette Hanshaw

In recent years, collectors of vintage music have been rediscovering singer Annette Hanshaw. She has a warm and expressive voice, and more than other singer of her time she strives to convey the essence of a lyric—thus imbuing trifles like "Six Feet of Papa" with far more dramatic impact than any other vocalist could give them.

We're happy to see the release of a new Hanshaw CD, **Annette Hanshaw: Lovable & Sweet** (ASV/Living Era CD AJA 5220). The disc has 25 tracks, dating from 1926-1934, spanning her entire commercial recording career (she appeared on radio through 1941). Eight of the tracks are duplicated on two previous Hanshaw CDs, *The Girl*

Next Door (Take Two TT408CD, reviewed in PT #14-15), and *The Twenties Sweetheart* (Jasmine JASCD 2542, reviewed in PT#22); the remaining 17 are reason enough to purchase this CD. The first eight, including "Black Bottom" and a role-reversed "Ain't He Sweet?," are from Annette's series for Pathé, and have the thin audio quality common to that label; however, the transfers throughout are remarkably full and free of surface noise.

Legend has it that Annette started her recording career at 15, after being discovered by Pathe Records executive Wally Rose while playing piano and singing at a party. Recently discovered evidence indicates that she may actually have been 25, not 15—but no matter, she had gifts that were rare in any singer of this period. After her father died suddenly, Annette strove to conquer her fear in the studio (she was a nervous wreck while making records and hated hearing her own voice) and recorded whatever material the label threw at her in order to support herself and her younger brother, Frankie. This would account for the several Hawaiian records she made with Frank Ferera's Trio; mercifully, only two are included here. Many of the tunes here are standards, and on "Body and Soul," "Little White Lies" and "Let's Fall in Love" the results are sublime.

Annette's catch-phrase at the end of her early records was, "That's All!" We hope this CD isn't all that we'll hear from Miss Hanshaw; she recorded many more gems worth rediscovering. (Available from Worlds Records, P.O. Box 1922, Novato CA 94948.)



Out West With Carson Robison

One of the most colorful singer-songwriters of the '30s was Carson Robison (pronounced RAH-bis-son), who sang traditional cowboy songs, and wrote his own tales of the west—some of them sentimental, others rambunctious. His voice had a built-in scowl (matched by his glum—not to say threatening—expression on publicity portraits). But even though he seems like a gruff old coot, you can hear a smile creeping into his voice as he sings his outlandish lyrics.

Born in Labette County, Kansas in August 1890, Robison came from a musical family and was a professional guitarist by 14. He made many popular records in the 1920s with singer Vernon Dalhart, and teamed later with Frank Luther (with whom he wrote the infamous "Barnacle Bill, the Sailor"). In 1931 he formed a group called the Pioneers with banjoists John and Bill Mitchell and guitarist Pearl Pickens. The group was a sensation in the States, the British Isles, New Zealand and Australia, broadcasting and recording extensively around the globe. Robison continued to have hits through the '40s (nine of which are available on the 2-CD box set *The Victory Collection*, reviewed in *Past Times* #20) and scored a final success with "Rockin' and Rollin' With Grandmaw" a year before his death in 1957.

Twenty-five of Robison's waxings, dating from 1928 through '36, have been newly reissued on *Home, Sweet Home on the Prairie* (ASV/Living Era CDAJA 5187). They demonstrate Robison's astonishing versatility; eighteen of the songs are his own compositions, and on all tracks he impresses as a vocalist, guitarist, harmonica player and whistler (notably on "Happy-Go-Lucky," which practically serves as an audio resumé).

The songs range from the honestly sentimental ("There's a Bridle Hangin' on the Wall," a salute to a departed horse) to the satirical ("I Was Born in Old Wyoming," whose lyric depicts a would-be cowboy). Musically, Robison ranges from folk music to jazz, with a surprising level of sophistication throughout. He even turns crooner on the lovely "Swanee Kitchen Door." Several of the tracks were made in London, and released on 78 only in England, making them particularly valuable to American collectors. The transfers are excellent. (Available from Worlds Records, P.O. Box 1922, Novato CA 94948.)

The Why and Wherefore of Genuine Country

Although many of the musicians it profiles first came to prominence in the 1950s or '60s, all of the performers depicted in Nicholas Dawidoff's *In the Country of Country* (Pantheon Books; 372 pages, hardcover; \$25.00) have their roots in earlier forms of country music. It seems as though the spirit of Jimmie Rodgers haunts all of them in some way, as Dawidoff makes clear in a terrific opening essay describing how Rodgers is still revered (and by some, reviled) in his hometown of Meridian, Mississippi.

Dawidoff is a journalist who grew up in New England, loving this music from exotic places like Cumberland Gap, Henagar and Rosine. He disdains the pop-oriented, commercialized stuff that passes for country music these days which has displaced the genuine article. But what made those songs and performers genuine?

Portraits of The Carter Family, Kitty Wells, Bill Monroe, Earl Scruggs, the Louvin Brothers and Rose Maddox, among others, describe the hardscrabble existence of the Depression-era South that gave them their drive to achieve better things, and their often melancholy viewpoints as performers. Some of them seem to have been tortured souls, or at least antisocial (A.P. Carter had a habit of wandering away mid-song, even during live shows; Bill Monroe was fiercely competitive even about shaking hands). Others, like Rose Maddox, seem to have enjoyed all of life's adventures (having spent her life's savings on seven open-heart surgeries, she went right on singing wherever they'd have her).

The development of country music as a commercial force, the emergence of women in country, the burgeoning of bluegrass, and the importance of radio and records in spreading the music are all colorfully described, as is today's sad domination of business over art. The performers described here sang from their hearts about a life they lived, without concern over demographics, marketing, playlists or product endorsements. This is the story of how true country music was born and grew, with a hopeful coda that a few mavericks might bring it back to the path that it's strayed from. (Available in bookstores.)

Country 78s Not Just "Hillbilly"

If the new Carson Robison CD whets your appetite for more vintage country recordings, give a listen to *Howdy! 25 Hillbilly All-Time Greats* (ASV/Living Era CD AJA 5140; \$13.00). Despite the title, the collection is really a fine survey of many different kinds of country-themed music from 1923 through 1942. It's bookended by two of Robison's recordings made in London, "Goin' to the Barn Dance Tonight" and "The West Ain't What it Used to Be." (Neither is on the Robison CD reviewed at left, so if you're a completist you'll have to buy this album, too.)

Country-style humor is represented by Wendell Hall's "It Ain't Gonna Rain No More" (a giant hit of 1923, but one that's only been remastered from very scratchy copies of this CD no exception), the Aaron Sisters' "She Came Rollin' Down the Mountain" (a great, unaccompanied close-harmony performance by the trio), the Hill Billies' sprightly performance of "Ragtime Cowboy Joe," and the Hoosier Hotshots' "Meet Me By the Icehouse, Lizzie" (which, for some reason, has an introduction from another record spliced on at the outset).

More traditional country music is provided by Jimmie Rodgers in "Blue Yodel" in a fine transfer, and "The Brakeman Blues" in one not so fine. The Carter Family is so very earthy on "My Clinch Mountain Home" that they haven't bothered to tune their guitars, but things are a tad more musical on "The Foggy Mountain Top," both tracks from 1929. The great Riley Puckett plays and applies his golden baritone to 1927's "Red Wing." Vernon Dalhart, actually a frustrated opera singer, sings "The Wreck of the Old '97" (the CD notes state that this version is from 1924, but it sounds like an electrical remake) and the surprisingly funny "The Runaway Train," made in London in 1931.

A new generation of country stars make early appearances here—Roy Acuff ("Wabash Cannon Ball"), Bob Wills ("New San Antonio Rose") and Ernest Tubb (whose original "Walkin' the Floor Over You" is dubbed from a worn copy). Modern audiences may associate "Born to Lose" with Ray Charles, but it's a pleasure to hear Tex Daffan's original from 1942. In all, this is a fine collection, intelligently combining rarities and obscurities and well-loved hits. (Available from Worlds Records, P.O. Box 1922, Novato CA 94948.)

Victor's 80 Years of Jazz

The Victor Talking Machine Company of Camden, New Jersey was the first label to release a jazz record, namely "Livery Stable Blues" (also known as "Barn Yard Blues") backed with "Dixieland Jass Band One-Step," both recorded on February 26, 1917 by the Original Dixieland Jass Band. (Victor was not, however, the first to record jazz, since Columbia had made—but at first rejected—"At the Darktown Strutters' Ball" by the ODJB on January 24, 1917.) The current owners of the Victor catalog, BMG Music and General Electric, are marking this event with an eight-volume set of CDs collectively entitled **RCA Victor 80th Anniversary: The First Label in Jazz**. Each volume is sold separately, retails for about \$15.98 in stores, and covers a decade or so of music.

Vol. 1 1917-1929 (RCA 09026 68777-2) has 25 tracks, almost all of them available on previous BMG compact discs. ("Meanest Blues" by the Original Memphis Five and "She's Crying For Me" by the New Orleans Rhythm Kings appear to be the exceptions.) The tracks are well chosen, but since most of them are classic records there are few surprises.

Comparison with the earlier CD issues indicates that the transfers on the new disc are the very same as those used before; "Davenport Blues" by Red & Miff's Stompers sounds just like it does on the 1991 collection *The Jazz Age: New York in the Twenties*. Paul Whiteman's "San" and Jean Goldkette's "Clementine," both used previously on the 1989 CD *Bix Lives!*, have the same crackle introduced in a mastering error. Most of the tracks sound just fine, though, and the collection will more than adequately serve the target audience—those who are just learning about early jazz or who want one representative CD in their collections.

The packaging is a "Digi-Pak" cardboard container which means that the cover will get scuffed, worn and split just like your old LPs. Serviceable essays by discographer Brian Rust and historian Stephanie Stein are accompanied by a reproduction of the Victor ledgers for the dates when the first issued ODJB tracks were recorded and assigned matrix numbers. Oddly, the Nipper trademark is nowhere to be seen on the supposed reproduction of the "Livery Stable Blues" label; GE and BMG must no longer have rights to it. (Available in retail stores.)



Billy Murray's Life on Record

Billy Murray was a prolific and highly popular recording artist from 1903 through 1927 (his career on records spanned from 1897 to 1943). His voice—a nasal tenor—always had a smile in it, thus many of his records were comedy songs. He also popularized an impressive roster of hits. Many of his records were topical songs—you could put together a mighty entertaining chronicle of the early 20th century through Billy Murray records.

As popular and important as Murray was, he's been all but ignored in the history books, so it's nice to see the publication of **Billy Murray: The Phonograph Industry's First Great Recording Artist** by Frank Hoffmann, Dick Carty and Quentin Riggs (Scarecrow Press; 544 pages, hardcover; \$75.00). While it's filled with an impressive amount of data, it's a frustrating book. Superfluous material is often in the body of a chapter, while more important facts are relegated to footnotes or appendices. There are often mystifying errors: Murray's death date is given as "Tuesday, August 22, 1954," while his funeral is dated at "Saturday, August 21" (and the 22nd was a Sunday, not a Tuesday). The discography is arranged alphabetically by song title, not by recording date, so it's impossible to trace the progression of Murray's career. Only the year of recording is given, not the precise date, an unforgivable omission since such information exists for much of Murray's work. Multiple releases of the same master are listed as if they were different performances, and in some cases are interspersed with other recordings of a given tune.

Some of the appendices are worthwhile (an Archive and Private Collection listing; commentary on selected recordings), but others are unnecessary (sketchy biographies of other recording artists from Murray's heyday, few of whom had any connection with him). This survey has some fascinating information, but it sorely needs to be better organized. (Available from Scarecrow Press, 4720 Boston Way, Lanham MD 20706.)

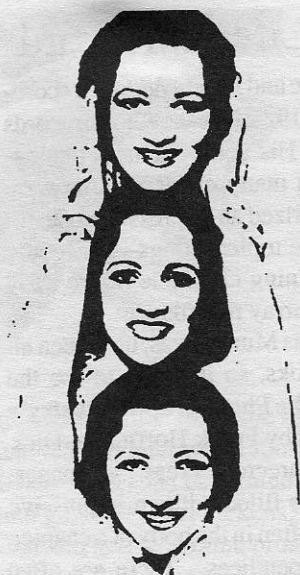
Tucker CD: Red Hot Songs, Lukewarm Audio

Seven decades after she made her best records and 30 years after her death, Sophie Tucker is still a powerful and captivating entertainer on disc. She has survived quite nicely in the digital age, with four CDs of her old waxings currently available. The latest is from England's Flapper label. **Sophie Tucker: Some of These Days** (PAST CD 7807; \$19.00) contains 24 tracks made between 1922 and 1936. Most have been previously reissued on LPs or are currently available on the three other compact discs.

Only five of the tracks on the new Flapper disc are otherwise unavailable on CD: "My Yiddishe Momma" (unfortunately, the English version only, with the Yiddish B-side rendition not included here); "He's a Good Man to Have Around," a funny torch song from 1929; and "When a Lady Meets a Gentleman Down South," a swinging side made in England in 1936—as are "Foolin' With the Other Woman's Man" and "If You Can't Sing It, You'll Have to Swing It."

Several of the tracks, such as "My Pet," "Complainin'" and "After You've Gone," are also available on Take Two's CD *Jazz Age Hot Mama* (reviewed in PT #9). When compared to that CD, the Flapper transfers have fewer of the minor pops and ticks, but also have a significantly diminished frequency range, with the highs being a bit muffled. A couple of other tracks may be duplicated from ASV's *Follow a Star* CD (both discs have a nasty splice on the line "Hawaii's the place [splice!] - Get a smile on your face" in "Makin' Wicky-Wacky Down in Waikiki"). Ultimately, this new Flapper disc probably has the best line-up of tracks of the available CDs, but it's disappointing in audio quality. (Available from Worlds Records, P.O. Box 1922, Novato CA 94948; (800) 742-6663.)





Boswell Sisters Rarities on CD

Sixty-one years after they amicably broke up the act in 1936, the Boswell Sisters still sound fresh and modern on their records. Their harmonies were impressive, but what was most distinctive about them was the way they reconstructed songs—changing the rhythm, the tempo and interpolating new melodic twists. The Andrews Sisters, who acknowledged the Boswells' influence, may have attained greater fame, but they were never as musically adventurous as Connie, Martha and Vet.

There are quite a few Boswell CDs currently available; unfortunately, many of them recombine the same handful of tracks. If some enterprising producer would put together all 75 of the Boswells' commercial waxings on a 3-CD set, it would fill a major gap in jazz history (hint, hint!). In the meantime, we can be grateful for **The Boswell Sisters: Airshots and Rarities 1930-35** (Retrieval RTR 79009;

\$16.00). Twelve of the tracks come from their syndicated radio show of 1930, recorded in Hollywood for the Continental Broadcasting Corporation. (Seven of these have previously appeared on Take Two's *Syncoating Harmonists from New Orleans*, reviewed in PT #10.)

The Boswells may not yet be operating at peak performance, and Martha's piano accompaniment (while excellent) is perhaps not quite as exciting as having the Dorsey Brothers' orchestra as the backing band. It's still fun to hear the Boswells' highly unusual treatment of "Let Me Sing and I'm Happy," which interpolates "Crazy Rhythm," "Farewell Blues" and "My Mammy"—all rendered in the unusual Boswell style.

It's particularly nice to have the two rare Boswells sides made in London in July 1935, "Fare Thee Well Annabelle" and "Lullaby of Broadway." Two tracks from a September 1934 Woodbury Soap show, two rare alternate takes, and two songs from a broadcast for Baker's Chocolate in November 1931 complete the package. The liner notes by Richard Sudhalter explain the Boswells' importance to popular music, and the quotes from Vet's daughter, Chica Minnerly, are very engaging and illuminate the sisters' relationship, as close personally as it was musically. The transfers by John R.T. Davies are splendid as usual. (Available from Worlds Records, P.O. Box 1922, Novato CA 94948.)

A Chance to Monitor the Merry Macs

The late '30s and the early '40s were a golden time for vocal groups—you had your Smoothies, your Pied Pipers, Modernaires, various combinations of Hits and a Miss. One of the best was the Merry Macs, three guys (originally Ted, Judd and Joe McMichael) and a gal (Marjory Garland for most of their career) whose harmonies were more complex than their competitors, and who really swung. Solid evidence of that is on the recent CD, **The Harmonious Hits of The Merry Macs** (Collectors' Choice/MCA CCM-025-2; \$12.98).

Although the line-up is different, stylistically they were more direct descendants of the Boswell Sisters than were those Andrews gals, since the Macs shared the Boswells' penchant for playing with the time and structure of a song ("Deep in the Heart of Texas" is really transformed—or transplanted—rhythmically and melodically).

If there's a flaw to their recorded legacy, it's that a lot of the songs they had to sing were lightweight. They're best remembered for "Mairzy Doats," and did similar novelties such as "The Hut-Sut Song" and "Jingle, Jangle, Jingle"; they manage to make these pretty tasty with their transformations, and really sing the pants off of "Breathless."

When given a better-quality song, such as "Cheatin' on the Sandman," the results are sublime. The backing group on most sides is fine, too—usually a small combo, with guitar and vibes prominent. Bing Crosby takes center stage on two tracks here, "Dolores" and "You Made Me Love You." A bonus is "Ridin' for a Fall," previously unreleased—which is a mystery since it's one of the better sides. The sound quality is flawless, with surprising fidelity. Although this disc is brief (only 39:09), it's a gratifying look back at a group which really deserves to be better remembered. (Available from Collectors' Choice Music, P.O. Box 838, Itasca IL 60143-0838; (800) 923-1122.)

Cabaret of the Past on CD

Cabaret still exists in Berlin, but it bares little resemblance to what it was in the 1920s when the politically and sexually subversive songs of Kurt Weill and Friedrich Hollaender were all the rage. "It is not the entertaining thing it was—it doesn't have this naughty, provocative edge," says German actress Ute Lemper. Nor did Bob Fosse's *Cabaret*, which the actress calls "not nearly subversive enough."

While Lemper is recording the racy tunes anew in both English and German—most recently on *Berlin Cabaret Songs* (Decca 452 601-2), an intriguing collection of original German recordings has surfaced. **Bei uns um die Gedachtniskirche rum...** (Come With Us Down Memory Lane) (0014532TLR) is the first release on Edel America's new label, The Listening Room, which will be "dedicated to rarities of record art." Music to our ears.

The double-CD was assembled from the archives of the Academy of Arts Berlin-Brandenburg, where shellac recordings of songs and comedy routines from the revues of the '20s were discovered. The well-preserved and newly restored recordings have a sparkling clarity.

The collection is devoted largely to the songs of Friedrich Hollaender, best known perhaps as the composer for *The Blue Angel*. Marlene Dietrich is heard on 5 of the 44 tracks, including her star-making theme song from the film, "Ich bin von Kopf bis Fuss." More obscure is Dietrich's pairing with Margo Lion on "Wenn die beste Freundin," which became the unofficial anthem of the German lesbian movement.

Among the other artists featured are Lotte Lenya (singing Kurt Weill's "Die Seerauber-Jenny"), and several names familiar from German and American films, notably Hans Albers and Kurt Gerron (both of whom were seen in *The Blue Angel*), Anna Sten, Curt Bois and Martin Kosleck. Also heard are The Comedian Harmonists, whose records sold in the millions before they were suppressed by Hitler.

The only conspicuous flaw in this compilation produced by Volker Kuhn is that the liner notes are entirely in German. Edel America should have provided an English translation of the extensive notes and song lyrics on behalf of cabaret lovers and Dietrich fans who are not fluent in Deutsch. (Information: Edel America Records, (818) 762-3335.)

— Jordan R. Young

Hit Songs, Forgotten Writer

If you were to list America's greatest songwriters, chances are you'd include Berlin, Gershwin, Porter, Rodgers & Hammerstein (or Hart), maybe Carmichael—but I'd bet the ranch you wouldn't list Walter Donaldson. Who he? You can find out, and definitively, with **Yes Sir, That's My Baby: The Songs of Walter Donaldson** (ASV/Living Era CD AJA 5206; \$13.00), a new CD with 26 tracks from 1922 through '44 which show why he deserves to be as well known as his many hit songs.

Just why Donaldson's name isn't better remembered is a real mystery. He wrote everything from uptempo songs to ballads, was nominated for an Academy Award, and enjoyed much success through dozens of hits. Maybe it's because Donaldson was a shy man who avoided the spotlight. Nevertheless, he tore into life with an unbridled zest, indulging his passions for golf, stargazing, jazz, sports, traveling, the theatre and, especially, the racetrack. He nevertheless worked diligently on new melodies every day, often writing the lyrics as well (but also collaborating at various times with Gus Kahn, Harold Adamson, and Johnny Mercer, among others). His last few years, sadly, were plagued by illness and depression, and he died, only 54, in 1947.

The odds are better than 8 to 5 that you'll know Donaldson hits such as "My Blue Heaven" (heard here in the classic record by Gene Austin), "At Sundown" (wailed by cornetist Muggsy Spanier's Ragtime Band), "Love Me or Leave Me" (by Ruth Etting, of course), and "Makin' Whoopee" (yes, Eddie Cantor). Longshot entries are "When You're in Love," a ballad rendered by tenor Tito Schipa; "I've Had My Moments" by the Quintet of the Hot Club of France; and "Did I Remember?," which most people don't despite its Oscar nomination, heard here by Billie Holiday with help from Artie Shaw and Bunny Berigan.

Sound quality is excellent throughout, even on the older tracks such as Ted Lewis' "Where'd You Get Those Eyes?" from 1926, and Paul Whiteman's 1922 acoustic of "Carolina in the Morning." Jolson collectors will want this package for the 1942 live performance of "My Mammy," and the British bands of Jack Payne ("My Baby Just Cares for Me") and Roy Fox ("It's Been So Long") are a delight. (Available from Worlds Records, P.O. Box 1922, Novato CA 94948.)

Show Tunes and Their Finest Practitioners

Even though they aren't staging quite as many musicals as they did in the '20s, '30s and '40s, the public still has a healthy interest in show music, particularly of that golden era. As a result, MCA Records has been reissuing many of its vintage cast albums on a new Broadway Gold imprint.

One of the most interesting recent releases is **One Touch of Venus and Lute Song** (MCAD-11354), which combines the recordings from two shows starring Mary Martin. The first was a fantasy comedy about an ancient statue of the goddess of love which suddenly comes to life in modern-day (well, 1943) New York. It featured a book and lyrics by Ogden Nash and S.J. Perelman, with music by Kurt Weill; the best-remembered song was "Speak Low." *Lute Song*, produced in 1946, was radically different, a musical drama based on a



14th-century Chinese play. The music was by Raymond Scott (in a vein far removed from his quirky Quintette pieces), with lyrics by Bernard Hanighen—likewise very different from the lighthearted rhymes he'd written for "Bob White" and "The Dixieland Band." Both scores deserve to be preserved, but the *Venus* songs are much livelier and will probably warrant more encores on your CD player. The superb booklet notes are by Max O. Preo, editor of *Show Music* magazine; the transfers are also wonderfully clear, exhibiting not even a trace of surface noise. (Available from retail outlets.)

During this same period, Miss Martin was occasionally appearing in films for Paramount (a firm which had no idea what to do with her) and recording for Decca (ditto), although she did make a number of sides which are great fun today. All 16 of these tracks are collected in **Mary Martin: The Decca Years 1938-1946** (Koch 3-7906-2). Six numbers are Cole Porter compositions—including "My Heart Belongs to Daddy," natch, as well as other comedy numbers such as "Katie Went to Haiti" and the romantic "Why Shouldn't I?" There's more fun with "Ain't it a Shame About Mame?" and "Kiss the Boys Goodbye," but the highlight is "The Waiter and the Porter and the Upstairs Maid," sung in tandem with Bing Crosby (who also guests on "Wait Till the Sun Shines, Nellie") and Jack Teagarden. All of the tracks sound fine, except for the slightly raspy "Let's Do It," which does however include the rarely-heard verse. "Mountain High, Valley Low," the hit from *Lute Song*, closes the album. (Available from retailers and from Koch International, 2 Tri-Harbor Court, Port Washington NY 11050.)

Within a few years of *Lute Song*, Miss Martin would be starring in *South Pacific* and later on, *The Sound of Music*—both with scores by Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II. A wonderful souvenir of their careers—together and with other collaborators—is provided in the compact disc **Rodgers and Hammerstein: Interviews with Tony Thomas** (Facet F/CD 8108; \$9.98). The interviews were conducted separately on the same day in February, 1960. (Although Hammerstein would die of stomach cancer on August 22, he sounds perfectly fine here.) Both men are absolute charmers; the Rodgers interview begins with Thomas playing a "do you remember" game about very obscure Rodgers & Hart tunes—every one of which Rodgers remembers and plays for us. Hammerstein is quite talkative for someone who agonized over every word of every lyric; he makes the observation that "When you write fast, you don't write very well," a point with which Mr. Rodgers, who wrote melodies very quickly, might have differed. The sound quality is crystal clear, and this is a superb memento of three talented men—the third being Mr. Thomas, who passed away in mid-July. He was a prolific show business historian who was truly a scholar and a gentleman, and he will be sorely missed. (Available from Delos International, 1645 N. Vine Street, Suite 340, Hollywood CA 90028; (213) 962-2626.)

Finally, it's most welcome news that DaCapo Press has reprinted Max Wilk's wonderful book **They're Playing Our Song: Conversations With America's Songwriters** (294 pages, paperback; \$14.95). A couple of the 26 profiles (Lorenz Hart, Jerome Kern) aren't actually "conversations," but the others benefit from first-hand, here's-how-I-did-it quotes from Johnny Mercer, Harold Arlen, Richard Rodgers, and their ilk, a generation touched by genius. (Available from Da Capo, 233 Spring Street, New York NY 10013.)

The Past Times CD Sale!

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ANNETTE HANSHAW: The Girl Next Door (1927-32) A great compilation of tunes by this charming stylist, backed by hot jazz musicians. Tunes include *It All Depends on You, I Can't Give You Anything But Love, Button Up Your Overcoat*, more.
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THE BOSWELL SISTERS: Syncopating Harmonists From New Orleans (1930-35) Rare commercial cuts, and unreleased selections from their 1930 radio shows! Among the tunes are *The Object of My Affection, I'll Never Say Never Again*, more.
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RUTH ETTING: Goodnight My Love (1930-37) Features rare discs from the height of Ruth's popularity to her premature retirement in '37. Her gorgeous, plaintive voice adorns *Let Me Sing and I'm Happy, Exactly Like You, Goodnight My Love*, more.
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BUDDY CLARK: Band Vocals From the Thirties (1934-37) Features the young crooner with the bands of Freddy Martin, Eddy Duchin, Benny Goodman. *Stars Fell on Alabama, Bye Bye Baby*, more.
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KATE SMITH: Emergence of a Legend (1930-39) Kate's pure, golden voice is featured in records from the decade in which she rose to stardom. Among the songs are *You Call it Madness, The Continental*, and her theme *When the Moon Comes Over the Mountain*.
TT 401.....\$12.98

PHIL HARRIS: ECHOES FROM THE COCONUT GROVE Phil's great early band is heard here in rare transcriptions from 1932-33. Vocals by Phil, The Three Ambassadors, Leah Ray, Jack Smith and others. The tunes include *Got a Date With an Angel, Rockin' Chair, Mimi*, and the very funny *How's About It*.
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GENE AUSTIN: A TIME TO RELAX At last, a CD devoted to the guy who created the style followed by Bing Crosby, Perry Como and other "intimate" singers. Austin casts his spell on *I've Got A Feeling I'm Falling, My Fate Is in Your Hands, Love Letters in the Sand* — and *My Blue Heaven*, too.
TT414CD.....\$12.98

LIBBY HOLMAN: MOANIN' LOW The Broadway star torches her way through *Can't We Be Friends?, A Ship Without a Sail and Body and Soul*. Jazz fans will enjoy the Roger Wolfe Kahn band on *Cooking Breakfast For the One I Love* and The Cotton Pickers on *He's a Good Man to Have Around*.
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BIX BEIDERBECKE: Bix Restored (1924-1927) The brilliant jazz cornetist is saluted in this lovingly remastered 3-CD set which includes every Bix track (including alternates) from his debut with the Wolverines to the September 1927 finale of the Jean Goldkette band. Includes rarities such as *Adoration* and all three versions of *In My Merry Oldsmobile*. Also included: Bix's first and best tracks with the Frank Trumbauer band—*Singin' the Blues, I'm Comin' Virginia*, more.
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DCP301D.....\$15.98

HOT DANCE OF THE ROARING 20's Here's a brand new collection of unreleased Edison material from 1928 and '29, a 21-track marathon of beloved songs like *Let's Do It, Singin' in the Rain, I'll Get By and Makin' Whoopee*—along with wonderful obscurities such as *Sunny Skies and Wipin' the Pan*. The bands include the Piccadilly Players, the Seven Blues Babies, and the orchestras of Bernie Stevens, Al Friedman, B.A. Rolfe and Phil Spitalny. Fun!!
DCP202D.....\$17.98

THE OLD MASTERS:

MILDRED BAILEY: Volume One, Sweet Beginnings One of the premier vocalists of jazz finally gets her due. This volume contains Mildred's first 21 recordings (including *Wrap your Troubles in Dreams, Georgia On My Mind* and two versions of *When It's Sleepy Time Down South*). She's teamed on these 1929-32 tracks with Eddie Lang, Frank Trumbauer, Jimmie Noone, Paul Whiteman and Glen Gray.
MB103.....\$12.98

MILDRED BAILEY: Volume Two, Band Vocalist More terrific singing from Miss Bailey in 22 selections from 1931 through '34; the fidelity and the performances are excellent on waxings such as *Lazy Bones*, her signature song *Rockin' Chair*, and jumping renditions of *Doin' the Uptown Lowdown* and *Heat Wave*. She's paired with the orchestras of Paul Whiteman and Leonard Joy, but most tracks feature her with the Dorsey Brothers and the early band of Benny Goodman.
MB 104.....\$12.98

TEXAS ROSE/OJL:

MILTON BROWN AND THE MUSICAL BROWNIES Here's the band that really started Western Swing! With fiddles, banjo and guitars in their line-up, you might mistake this for a hillbilly band, but uh uh—these fellows played jazz with a southwestern flavor. Brown was a terrific and personable singer, with a warm and versatile voice. This 5-CD set has everything the group ever made, almost six hours' worth of great tracks such as *Sweet Jennie Lee; St. Louis Blues; Copenhagen; Some of These Days; Avalon*; and *Right or Wrong*. Also included are the 14 tracks with the band led by younger brother Derwood Brown after Milton's untimely death. The sound quality is stunning.
TXRCD1-5.....\$64.98

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The Theatre of Thrills

Back in *Past Times* issue #19, we reviewed a book about the great radio series *Suspense*, written by Chris Lembesis and Randy Eidemiller. That book has been revised and reprinted as ***Suspense 1942-1962*** (122 pages, paperback; \$25.00 postpaid).

The new edition is *much* more attractively designed, and contains most of the material that was in the earlier book (although a rejected script, "The Hand" by Mel Dinelli, no longer appears). Brief but fact-filled essays detail the writing of the show, its casting, and the importance of music and sound effects. Interviews with producer-director Elliott Lewis and actress Agnes Moorehead add some colorful, personal details. A section on how most of the 944 episodes managed to survive is fascinating, and a list of the 40 which are not known to exist is tantalizing and saddening.

Lembesis (who, incidentally, does superb audio-restoration work on old radio shows as his "day job") and Eidemiller add a personal touch themselves; Eidemiller recalls being a guest in the studio during the broadcast of September 4, 1947, while Lembesis adds some memories of encounters with announcer George Walsh, and stars William Conrad, James Stewart and Joseph Cotten (whose surname is unfortunately misspelled as "Cotton" throughout). Most of the book is taken up with listings of the 944 episodes—a chronological listing giving title, airdate, star and other information on that entry; an alphabetical index, and a third listing crediting the authors (information which probably would have been more useful if included in the chronological listing). A final appendix compares programs which were used on both *Suspense* and another CBS nail-biter, *Escape*.

It would have been nice to see some photographs (the only one included is a shot of writer-director-producer Anthony Ellis with the great Ray Bradbury, who wrote many *Suspense* scripts and who contributes a new foreword here). Some information about the TV version of the series would also have been appreciated. However, there's a lot of intriguing information in this bouquet to one of radio's greatest shows. (Available from Randy Eidemiller, 7700 Lampson Avenue #37, Garden Grove CA 92641.)



Bud Collyer does some research.

helps preserve the continuity of the story line. These early episodes very quickly establish Superman's birth and escape from the planet Krypton, and his assumption of a new identity as Clark Kent, mild-mannered reporter. They're well-paced and absorbing, and the performances of radio pros such as Ned Wever, Rollie Bester and especially Clayton "Bud" Collyer as the Man of Steel are outstanding.

The 54-page booklet is really a pip, including full biographical information on the cast and crew, a history of the series, a reprint of a Superman short story adapted from one of the radio episodes, full credits and synopses for each of the 27 shows, and many rare photos. An added bonus is the foreword by Jackson Beck, who would join the series as narrator a few years after the shows included here. The sound quality is a Superman-sized leap beyond previously available copies of these shows. The decades melt away, and you feel as if you're in the room with Bud Collyer and company. (Available from Radio Spirits, P.O. Box 2141, Schiller Park IL 60176; 1-800-RADIO-48.)

Superman, In and On the Air

From 1940 through 1951, Superman not only traveled through the air but through the airwaves, thanks to a radio series that ran in various incarnations on Mutual and ABC. The first 27 episodes of the series are newly available from Radio Spirits as a box set, ***Superman on Radio*** (\$24.98 for four cassettes; \$34.98 for five CDs).

The 27 shows originally ran 15 minutes each; they've been carefully edited to about 13:30 here. If you've ever heard unedited radio kid shows, with the relentless and lengthy commercials included, you can well understand why the spots have been omitted. The editing actually

Stan the Man's 1957 CBS Shows, Part 2

Lots of radio histories would have you believe that the golden age was over by 1950. Certainly, the available audience was dwindling thanks to TV, but some fine, creative work was being done all through the decade. The summer of 1957 was enlivened when CBS broadcast a new and *very* original comedy series, *The Stan Freberg Show*. One can't exactly say that it influenced future shows (cancelled after fifteen weeks, Freberg's show was the last network comedy series on radio), but it's still fondly remembered and holds up remarkably well after 40 years, as you can hear on the new Radio Spirits box set, ***The Stan Freberg Show: Final 8 Episodes*** (\$24.98 for cassettes, \$34.98 for compact discs).

Ever since he burst upon the record charts in February 1951 with "John and Marsha," Freberg had been winning millions of record-buying fans with what were basically 3-minute radio sketches. The CBS series gave him the opportunity to expand his comedic horizons, and he succeeded admirably. Although Freberg had a backlog of popular sketches and songs from his records, most of the show consisted of new material which he wrote with Pete Barnum, and performed with an exceptional cast: Daws Butler, June Foray (who seem to conjure up about two thousand voices between them), straight-man extraordinaire Peter Leeds. Even the music was witty, thanks to the arrangements of Billy May.

This box set has the second half of the show's brief run, and the sound is superb on all eight shows. (Original source tapes have been located for the entire run of the show; they hadn't yet been rediscovered when Radio Spirits released the box containing the first seven shows, which accounts for the somewhat lesser sound quality there. Radio Spirits CEO Carl Amari has announced that an upgraded version of the first box set will be made available.) Among the funnier sketches are "Uninterrupted Melody: The Story of the Good Humor Men," "The Abominable Snowman and his Fiancee," another visit to Hi-Fi expert Herman Horne, and the "Freberg Do-It-Yourself Grand Piano." The fifteenth show is a sort of "greatest hits" farewell, with favorites from the series ("Elderly Man River") and Stan's records ("Banana Boat Song") being reprised.

The shows are entirely complete, each cassette or CD running one hour and containing two shows. The accompanying booklet, co-written by Joe Bevilacqua and Freberg, are nicely detailed and very informative. (Available from Radio Spirits, Inc., P.O. Box 2141, Schiller Park IL 60176; 1-800-RADIO-48.)

Bob & Ray in Your Mailbox

Wally Ballou, Biff Burns, Mary McGoon, Hazel Hunciford, Webley Webster—these are but a few of the characters created by Bob Elliott and Ray Goulding, who enlivened the airwaves with a brand of humor that was subtle and zany, witty and silly at the same time. They found each other at WHDH, Boston in 1946 and knew almost immediately that they shared a comedic wavelength. From local radio they went to the networks, television, national commercials, Broadway, books, recordings, and back to local radio. They were mighty prolific over their 45-year partnership, which ended only with Ray Goulding's death.

A whole mail-order catalog's worth of Bobandraylia is available from Radioart. Of particular interest is the *Vintage Bob & Ray* cassette series of the team's '40s and '50s work. Compact discs (among them reissues of rare LPs from the '50s), a video and a commemorative T-shirt are also available. There's also a Bob & Ray website with downloadable sound clips and full details on the tapes (<http://www.bobandray.com>). Contact Radioart at P.O. Box 2000 GPO, New York NY 10116-2000; (800) 528-4424.

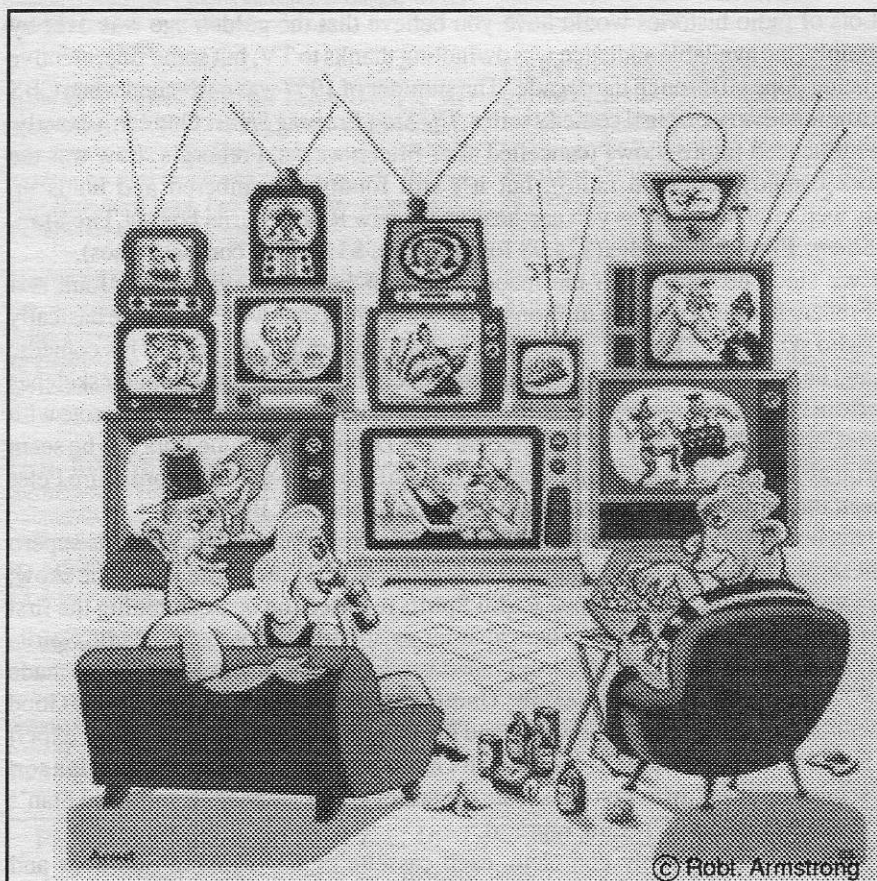
Amos 'n' Andy TV Series Still Controversial

The television version of *Amos 'n' Andy*, which has been a low-profile series for the past 30 years, is making a return on home video through Bridgestone Multimedia. Based in Phoenix, Bridgestone's video releases are primarily Christian titles, with a smattering of public-domain feature films and westerns. The *Amos 'n' Andy* shows are sold at retail outlets in sets of two videocassettes, each tape containing five half-hour episodes.

The tapes made their debut in January, and have sold more than 40,000 units in their first six months on the market, but as you might expect, a few eyebrows have been raised in reaction to the aggressive marketing of a series which still strikes many as presenting a distorted view of black people. Bridgestone's packaging makes no mention of the controversy, but the firm will soon address the issue by releasing a documentary made in the 1970s about the series. Another point of contention is the ownership of the 78 episodes, which were originally produced between 1951 and '53. CBS maintains that it still owns the shows, while Bridgestone, and other video dealers, state that they're in the public domain.

Opinions about the show vary wildly, particularly among black viewers. An article in the *Los Angeles Times* quoted Donovan Brandt, of the Eddie Brandt Saturday Matinee video store, as saying that the shows were "very popular, and 70% to 80% of the people who ask for them are black."

Your editor has mixed feelings about the TV show; had there been other programs at the time starring black actors, it would be easier to accept it simply as a well-made situation comedy. The television *Amos 'n' Andy* provided work and publicity for many talented black actors, and did so in a way that was not demeaning—for the most part. Most of the characters are sympathetic and appealing, although the slow-witted janitor Lightnin' always makes us cringe. Although it has occasional lapses in taste, *Amos 'n' Andy* actually seems tame when compared with some of the current black-oriented sitcoms. The show's creators, Freeman Gosden and Charles Correll (who portrayed Amos 'n' Andy on radio from 1928 through 1960) may have been naive about race relations but they certainly weren't bigots. They loved those characters, and for decades most of America did too.



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When Radio Was Program Guide

August - October 1997

When Radio Was is a syndicated radio program broadcast on 300 affiliate radio stations from coast to coast. Up to five hours of *When Radio Was* can be heard in most parts of the country on these 300 affiliates. Some affiliates run the program Monday through Friday, some air the program on weekends and some do both. Check with your local *When Radio Was* affiliate for exact times of broadcast. To find out what radio station in your area carries *When Radio Was*, call 1-847-524-0200 extension 231, Monday through Friday between 9 AM and 5 PM Central Time.

AUGUST 1997

Broadcast Week One

The Shadow 1-11-48 "The Bones of the Dragon" w/ Bret Morrison / **Lum & Abner** 3-17-43 "Pine Ridge Needs a Dentist" w/ Chester Lauck and Norris Goff

Broadcast Week Two

The New Adventures of Michael Shayne 1950s "Phantom Neighbor" w/ Jeff Chandler / **The Life of Riley** 9-14-46 "Flashback: Works for Sydney Monahan" w/ William Bendix (part 1)

The Life of Riley 9-14-46 "Flashback: Works for Sydney Monahan" w/ William Bendix (part 2) / **The Green Hornet** 4-20-46 "Grand Larceny on Wheels" w/ Robert Hall

The Defense Rests 5-6-51 "Case of Joseph Moriano" w/ Mercedes McCambridge / **Fibber McGee & Molly** 1-8-46 "Guess the number of Beans" w/ Jim and Marian Jordan (part 1)

Fibber McGee & Molly 1-8-46 "Guess the number of Beans" w/ Jim and Marian Jordan (part 2) / Arch Oboler's **Plays** 4-26-45 "The House I Live In" w/ Raymond Massey

The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes 4-7-47 "The Tolling Bell" w/ Tom Conway / **Bob & Ray** 1950s w/ Bob Elliott and Ray Goulding

Broadcast Week Three

Dragnet 2-28-52 "The Big Plant" w/ Jack Webb / **Burns & Allen** 4-29-48 "The New Car" w/ George Burns & Gracie Allen (part 1)

Burns & Allen 4-29-48 "The New Car" w/ George Burns & Gracie Allen (part 2) / **Suspense** 9-28-44 "The Man Who Couldn't Lose" w/ Gene Kelly

Tales of the Texas Rangers 6-29-52 "The Ex Con" w/ Joel McCrea / **Abbott & Costello** 11-2-44 w/ Bud Abbott & Lou Costello (part 1)

Abbott & Costello 11-2-44 w/ Bud Abbott & Lou Costello (part 2) / **Box Thirteen** 1-31-49 "Double Trouble" w/ Alan Ladd

Gunsmoke 10-17-52 "Lochinvar" w/ William Conrad / **Police Headquarters** 1939 "Laundry Truck Kidnapping" w/ Lyndsay MacCarrie

Broadcast Week Four

The Six Shooter 2-21-54 "Battle at Tower Rock" w/ James Stewart / **The Jack Benny Program** 2-17-52 "New York Philharmonic plays Jack's song in his Dream" w/ Jack Benny and all his gang (part 1)

The Jack Benny Program 2-17-52 w/ Jack and all his gang (part 2) / **Gangbusters** 1940s "The Inside Track"

Frontier Gentleman 3-9-58 "Claim Jumpers" w/ John Dehner / **The Edgar Bergen & Charlie McCarthy Show** 1940s w/ guest, Hoagy Carmichael (part 1)

The Edgar Bergen & Charlie McCarthy Show 1940s w/ guest, Hoagy Carmichael (part 2) / **Escape** 1-11-53 "Conqueror's Isle" w/ Harry Bartell

Boston Blackie 9-3-46 "Murder By the Book" w/ Dick Kollmar / **Lum & Abner Show** 3-18-43 #376 "Dentist Samuel W. Snide is Coming" w/ Chester Lauck and Norris Goff

Broadcast Week Five

The CBS Radio Workshop 2-10-56 "Storm" w/ William Conrad / **My Favorite Husband** 11-11-49 "Babysitting" w/ Lucille Ball (part 1)

My Favorite Husband 11-11-49 "Babysitting" w/ Lucille Ball (part 2) / **Casey, Crime Photographer** 1-16-47 "The Surprising Corpse" w/ Staats Cottsworth

The Lone Ranger 7-6-45 "Guilty Hands" w/ Brace Beemer / **The Great Gildersleeve** 6-17-45 "Neighborhood Party" w/ Hal Peary (part 1)

The Great Gildersleeve 6-17-45 "Neighborhood Party" w/ Hal Peary (part 2) / **The Whistler** 8-27-47 "Curtain Call" w/ Tony Barrett

Suspense 10-5-44 "Dateline: Lisbon" w/ John Hodiak / **Baby Snooks & Daddy** 1940s w/ Fanny Brice and Hanley Stafford

SEPTEMBER 1997

Broadcast Week One

The Shadow 4-21-46 "Gorilla Man" / **Fibber McGee & Molly** 1-15-46 "Treasure Map" w/ Jim and Marian Jordan (part 1)

Fibber McGee & Molly 1-15-46 "Treasure Map" w/ Jim and Marian Jordan (part 2) / **Frontier Gentleman** 3-9-58 "Claim Jumpers" w/ John Dehner

The Green Hornet 4-13-46 "The Figure on the Photograph" w/ Robert Hall / **The Life of Riley** 9-21-46 "Boat Story" w/ William Bendix (part 1)

The Life of Riley 9-21-46 "Boat Story" w/ William Bendix (part 2) / **The Casebook of Gregory Hood** 7-2-46 "Murder in Celluloid" w/ Gale Gordon

Dragnet 3-6-52 "Big Evans" w/ Jack Webb / **Lum & Abner** 3-22-43 #377 "Dr. Snide Arrives" w/ Chester Lauck and Norris Goff

Broadcast Week Two

Burns & Allen 2-17-49 w/ George Burns & Gracie Allen and guests, Mr. & Mrs. James Mason / **Yours Truly, Johnny Dollar** 7-16-56 "Star of Capetown Matter" w/ Bob Bailey (part 1 of 5)

Tales of the Texas Rangers 7-6-52 "Boomerang" w/ Joel McCrea / **Yours Truly, Johnny Dollar** 7-17-56 "Star of Capetown Matter" w/ Bob Bailey (part 2 of 5)

The Jack Benny Program 2-24-52 "Spoof: The Fiddler" w/ Jack and all his gang / **Yours Truly, Johnny Dollar** 7-18-56 "Star of Capetown Matter" w/ Bob Bailey (part 3 of 5)

Box Thirteen 11-8-48 "Sealed Instructions" w/ Alan Ladd / **Yours Truly, Johnny Dollar** 7-19-56 "Star of Capetown Matter" w/ Bob Bailey (part 4 of 5)

The Six Shooter 12-27-53 "Ned Plummer's Widow" w/ James Stewart / **Yours Truly, Johnny Dollar** 7-20-56 "Star of Capetown Matter" w/ Bob Bailey (part 5 of 5)

When Radio Was Program Guide

August - October 1997 Continued

Broadcast Week Three

Gangbusters 1940s "The Safe Cracking Combine" / **The Abbott & Costello Program** 11-9-44 w/ Bud Abbott & Lou Costello (part 1)

The Abbott & Costello Program 11-9-44 w/ Bud Abbott & Lou Costello (part 2) / **The Lone Ranger** 7-9-45 "Ambush" w/ Brace Beemer

Suspense 10-12-44 "The Merry Widower" w/ Reginald Gardner / **The Great Gildersleeve** 9-2-45 "Trip to Grass Lake" w/ Hal Peary (part 1)

The Great Gildersleeve 9-2-45 "Trip to Grass Lake" w/ Hal Peary (part 2) / **Boston Blackie** 9-10-46 "Marked for Murder" w/ Dick Kollmar

Escape 1-25-53 "Diary of a Madman" w/ Ben Wright / **Police Headquarters** 1939 "Warehouse Job" w/ Lyndsay MacHarrie

Broadcast Week Four

Have Gun, Will Travel 11-23-58 "Strange Vendetta" w/ John Dehner / **The Edgar Bergen & Charlie McCarthy Show** 1940s w/ Frankie Laine (part 1)

The Edgar Bergen & Charlie McCarthy Show 1940s w/ Frankie Laine (part 2) / **The Whistler** 8-6-47 "Dark Future" w/ Frank Lovejoy

The Adventures of Ellery Queen 5-6-48 "One Diamond" w/ Hugh Marlowe / **Duffy's Tavern** 11-6-46 w/ Ed Gardner and guest, Louella Parsons (part 1)

Duffy's Tavern 11-6-46 w/ Ed Gardner and guest, Louella Parsons (part 2) / **Gunsmoke** 10-24-52 "The Mortgage" w/ William Conrad

The CBS Radio Workshop 2-17-56 "Season of Disbelief & Hail and Farewell" Narrated by Ray Bradbury / **Lum & Abner** 3-23-43 #378 "Golden Era Discussion Club introduced to Dr. Snide" w/ Chester Lauck and Norris Goff

Broadcast Week Five

This Is Your FBI 2-2-51 "Innocent Hijackers" w/ Stacy Harris / **My Favorite Husband** 11-18-49 "Katy and Mr. Nogley" w/ Lucille Ball (part 1)

My Favorite Husband 11-18-49 "Katy and Mr. Nogley" w/ Lucille Ball (part 2) / **Dimension X** 8-4-50 "Perigi's Wonderful Dolls" w/ Les Damon

OCTOBER 1997

Broadcast Week One

The Shadow 4-14-46 "Unburied Dead" w/ Bret Morrison / **Burns & Allen** 3-24-49 w/ George Burns & Gracie Allen and guest, Jane Wyman (part 1)

Burns & Allen 3-24-49 w/ Jane Wyman (part 2) / **The Green Hornet** 5-4-46 "Murder For Sale" w/ Robert Hall

Dragnet 8-14-52 "The Big Drive" w/ Jack Webb / **Baby Snooks & Daddy** 1940s w/ Fanny Brice and Hanley Stafford

Broadcast Week Two

Box Thirteen 11-15-48 "Find Me, Find Death" w/ Alan Ladd / **Fibber McGee & Molly** 1-22-46 "Pioneer Day" w/ Jim and Marian Jordan (part 1)

Fibber McGee & Molly 1-22-46 "Pioneer Day" w/ Jim and Marian Jordan (part 2) / **The Six Shooter** 11-8-53 "Capture of Stacy Gault" w/ James Stewart

Gangbusters 1940s "The Mound City Safe Cracker" / **The Abbott & Costello Program** 11-16-44 w/ Bud Abbott & Lou Costello (part 1)

The Abbott & Costello Program 11-16-44 w/ Bud Abbott & Lou Costello (part 2) / **The Adventures of Sam Spade** 4-17-49 "Edith Hamilton" w/ Howard Duff

Have Gun, Will Travel 11-30-58 "Foot to Wickenburg" w/ John Dehner / **Police Headquarters** 1939 "James Davis Killed" w/ Lyndsay Macarrie

Broadcast Week Three

Tales of the Texas Rangers 7-13-52 "Finger Man" w/ Joel McCrea / **The Jack Benny Program** 3-2-52 w/ Frank Sinatra, Danny Kaye, George Burns & Groucho Marx sing Jack's song (part 1)

The Jack Benny Program 3-2-52 (part 2) / **Boston Blackie** 9-17-46 "The Rental Racket" w/ Dick Kollmar

The Lone Ranger 7-2-45 "Pestilence and Silver" w/ Brace Beemer / **The Edgar Bergen & Charlie McCarthy Show** 1940s w/ guest, Don Ameche (part 1)

The Edgar Bergen & Charlie McCarthy Show 1940s w/ Don Ameche (part 2) / **Broadway Is My Beat** 7-7-49 "Jimmy Dorn" w/ Larry Thor

The Saint 9-17-50 "The Ghost That Giggled" w/ Barry Sullivan / **Lum & Abner** 3-24-43 #379 "Dr. Snide Sets Up Office in the Feed Room" w/ Chester Lauck and Norris Goff

Broadcast Week Four

Suspense 11-2-44 "The Singing Walls" w/ Van Johnson / **The Fred Allen Show** 11-18-45 w/ guest, Boris Karloff (part 1)

The Fred Allen Show 11-18-45 w/ guest, Boris Karloff (part 2) / **Dark Venture** 12-2-46 "The Man in 206" w/ Carl Harberg

Crime Classics 10-7-53 "The Hangman and William Palmer" w/ Lou Merrill / **My Favorite Husband** 10-28-49 "Halloween Party" w/ Lucille Ball (part 1)

My Favorite Husband 10-28-49 "Halloween Party" w/ Lucille Ball (part 2) / **Escape** 8-22-51 "Silent Horror" w/ Harry Bartell

Murder By Experts 8-8-49 "The Dark Island" w/ John Dickson Carr / **Unsolved Mysteries** 1936 "Safari of the Dead"

Broadcast Week Five

The Molle Mystery Theatre 3-28-47 "Triangle of Death" w/ Elspeth Eric / **Grand Marquee** 8-21-47 "Haunt Me a House" w/ Jim Ameche (part 1)

Grand Marquee 8-21-47 "Haunt Me a House" w/ Jim Ameche (part 2) / **Lights Out** 2-9-43 "He Dug It Up" w/ Arch Oboler

The Mysterious Traveler 1-30-44 "The House of Death" w/ Maurice Tarplin / **Ozzie & Harriet** 10-31-48 "Haunted House" w/ Ozzie & Harriet Nelson (part 1)

Ozzie & Harriet 10-31-48 "Haunted House" w/ Ozzie & Harriet Nelson (part 2) / **The Whistler** 8-13-47 "Whispered Verdict" w/ Irene Tedrow

Suspense 12-5-46 "The House on Cypress Canyon" w/ Robert Taylor / **Lights Out** segments "The Dark" and "Taking Papa Home" w/ Arch Oboler

Radio Teamwork Celebrated

Continued from Page 1

such as a local fire and an earthquake. Andy Devine adds to the fun as Mose Moots and Clarence Hartzell—best remembered as Vic & Sade's Uncle Fletcher—plays the similar character Ben Withers. Edgar Bergen had the unlikely position of being a one-man comedy team, and he gives voice to Charlie McCarthy and Mortimer Snerd in a 1946 broadcast in which guest Tallulah Bankhead condescends to appear in Charlie's new play, "The Kingdom of Miscellanea."

Finally, two action-adventure teams add to the mix. A May, 1954 episode of The Lone Ranger is exciting but Tonto isn't as prominent here as perhaps he should have been for a "teams" compilation. The 15-minute pilot show for a projected Batman and Robin series from 1950 is a real rarity. The episode, "The Monster of Dumphrey's Hall," is more of a mystery story than the action-type show one might expect, and actor John Emery is a rather formal-sounding Bruce Wayne-Batman. The Batman episode appears to be complete; the others have been sensitively edited to fit on CDs or on 75-minute cassettes (the omissions are commercials or public service announcements, with nothing integral missing from the broadcasts).

The sound quality is absolutely superb; you'll be hard-pressed to hear even the slightest trace of surface noise. The fullness and presence of the audio is a tribute to the high standards of the original engineers, and to the audio restoration folks at Radio Spirits (Craig Harding being credited for this collection). The booklet, as usual, is a classy addition, with an introduction from Jerry Lewis, a wonderfully well researched essay on radio's teams by Anthony Tollin; a description of each show in the collection, with full credits included; and several excellent photos.

We hope that Radio Spirits might consider a second volume with some of radio's other teams. If licensing permits, we could hear from Vic & Sade, Goodman and Jane Ace, Ethel and Albert, Bob & Ray, Stoopnagle & Budd, Amos 'n' Andy, Billy Jones and Ernie Hare, Hope and Crosby, Jack Benny and Fred Allen, Pancho and Cisco, Myrt and Marge, Lamont and Margot—and maybe even Tommy Riggs and Betty Lou, or Sergeant Preston and Yukon King! (Available from Radio Spirits, Inc., P.O. Box 2141, Schiller Park IL 60176; 1-800-RADIO-48.)

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Dean & Jerry Excel on Radio

You'll get a real surprise from Radio Spirits' collection of 18 episodes of *The Martin & Lewis Show*, available on six 90-minute cassettes (Stock no. 4109, \$34.98) or nine 60-minute compact discs (4110, \$39.98). The source material for the shows is from Jerry Lewis' private collection, and the sound quality is absolutely pristine. The shows are absolutely complete and uncut. The cassettes each include three shows, meaning that the middle program is divided by a side-break midway through, but these breaks are sensitively placed and no program material is lost.

Moreover—these shows are funny. Really funny. There's less of the crazy antics that you'll recall from the Martin & Lewis movies and TV shows; instead, there's warmth, charm, style and character-derived comedy. Dean emerges as the dominant partner here, and his natural, easygoing style really works well on radio. His humor is folksy and warm, and he comes across much like another crooner who'd sold his share of Kraft cheese and Philco radios over the airwaves. Jerry is a much more sympathetic character, seeming like a nice kid who's just a little confused. From a post-1956 standpoint, it's a little ironic to realize how much of Martin and Lewis's radio comedy derived from Jerry's concern that Dean was going to leave him and break up the team (which forms the plot of an episode with Frances Langford included here).

The guests on these episodes, which originally aired between April 3 and August 30 of 1949, are among Hollywood's biggest stars, and folks who didn't do a lot of comedy radio shows—Henry Fonda, John Garfield, Madeleine Carroll and Burt Lancaster among them. Comic actors Arthur Treacher, Victor Moore and William Bendix are good foils for the boys, as are Peter Lorre, John Caradine and William "Hopalong Cassidy" Boyd. Lucille Ball adds some of her comic charms (in the premiere show); so do Billie Burke and Jane Russell.

Dean's songs are a highlight of each show, and the contributions of radio pros such as Sheldon Leonard (as the boys' conniving next-door neighbor) add to the fun. Other comedy teams from movies and clubs didn't transfer well to radio, but Martin and Lewis are surprisingly effective in the medium. (Available from Radio Spirits, Inc., P.O. Box 2141, Schiller Park, IL 60176; 1-800-RADIO-48.)



Vincent Price with director Helen Mack

had a checkered career on the air. The suave crime fighter created by Leslie Charteris first came to radio on January 6, 1945, with Edgar Barrier in the role; the NBC series lasted only until March 31. On June 20 of that year, a new Saint series for CBS starring Brian Aherne made its debut, but it was gone by summer's end. Vincent Price came to the role on July 9, 1947 and made the role his own in series for CBS, Mutual and NBC which ran through 1951. His voice matched the part perfectly—he sounded so well-bred that even a cutting insult sounded like a compliment.

Metacom's *The Saint* (RM# 2301225; two cassettes; \$14.98) has four half-hour shows originally broadcast over Mutual in 1949. Price is very engaging as Templar, a sensitive and witty sleuth. While each episode has its share of laughs along with the suspense, the show never crosses into out-and-out comedy as did Sam Spade. The sound quality is fine on the first three episodes, although it would have been better had the Metacom folks used Dolby to combat some of the tape hiss. The fourth episode, "Prove I Did It," sounds rather harsh and dupey, but it's a good yarn and still listenable. Only 24 shows from the series are known to survive at all, so perhaps we can't quibble too much about the audio quality. The contributions of radio veterans Betty Lou Gerson and Lurene Tuttle add to the fun. (Available from Metacom, 5353 Nathan Lane, Plymouth MN 55442; (612) 553-2000.)

The Great Musicals of -- Early TV!

We all cherish the great movie musicals of the '40s and early '50s, but it's a little startling to learn that original musicals were being produced on TV as far back as 1944. This revelation is but one of many surprises provided by *Television Musicals* by Joan Baxter (McFarland; 216 pages, hardcover; \$45.00). The book covers 228 shows (not 222, as specified on the cover) produced between 1944 and 1996; a healthy number of them were produced prior to 1960. (The very helpful Chronology shows that the peak years of the TV musical, quantity-wise, were 1955 through 1959, with another upswing in 1966-67.)

The shows are listed alphabetically, with date, time and duration of the broadcast; full credits and basic cast information, a list of the songs and a synopsis of the plot, often including behind-the-scenes information and quotes from period reviews.

Some of them are very tantalizing—such as *The Bachelor*, a 1956 NBC show starring Hal March, Jayne Mansfield, Carol Haney and Julie Wilson with a score by Steve Allen (including "This Could Be the Start of Something Big," written for this show). We'd love to see the Kukla, Fran and Ollie operetta *St. George and the Dragon*, produced in color in 1953 for NBC, and even though it didn't get very favorable reviews, we'd probably get a kick out of *Burlesque*, a 1955 special starring Jack Oakie, Joan Blondell, Dan Dailey and James Gleason. And there's probably no kinescope available, but it'd sure be interesting to see *The Boys From Boise*, the very first television musical, a two-hour spectacular from September 28, 1944 (and boasting such memorable songs as "You Put Your Brand on My Heart" and "Western Omelet"). Animated musical shows are included along with the live-action epics. In addition to the main text and the chronology, there's a bibliography, a song index and a name index. This is one of the better recent McFarland books, a thoroughly researched and well written history of an underappreciated genre. (Available for \$48 postpaid from McFarland, Box 611, Jefferson NC 28640.)

A Real Saint

If the explosive recent movie of *The Saint* starring Val Kilmer left you longing for the urbane charm of earlier incarnations of Simon Templar, you're in luck. Turner Home Entertainment released the classic RKO *Saint* films on videocassettes (most of them starring George Sanders), and now Metacom has released four episodes of the radio series with Vincent Price.

For all of the character's continued popularity, *The Saint*

A TV Editor's Splice of Life

Go ahead, name a well-known television director. Maybe Jim Burrows (of *Cheers*), or Fred Coe (who did many of the great early live dramas), or William Asher (of *I Love Lucy*). How about a well-known TV writer? Well, there's Rod Serling, Paddy Chayefsky, maybe even Neil Simon and Mel Brooks in the old Sid Caesar days. A famous TV producer? Gene Roddenberry, George Schlatter, Norman Lear, Aaron Spelling. But a famous TV editor? Hmmmm.

In the now more than 50-year history of TV, this vitally important part of its storytelling process has yet to properly recognized, even though today's television shows are so hyperkinetic that they're virtually nothing *but* editing. A guy who helped make that kind of editing possible (through his work on *Laugh-In*) and who was there at the start is Arthur Schneider, who recalls his adventures in *Jump Cut!: Memoirs of a Pioneer Television Editor* (McFarland; 208 pages, paperback; \$35.00).

"Jump Cut" is a nickname that Schneider acquired from Bob Hope, whose TV shows Schneider edited from 1951 through 1968. Hope didn't care if the edits between jokes in his monologue made him suddenly jump around, as long as every joke was a solid laugh. Schneider agonized over these edits, but the public didn't seem to notice, and Hope was pleased with his work (Schneider's son Robert began editing the shows in 1980).

Fortunately, most of Schneider's editing was much smoother, even if the conditions he worked under were not. He started out by recording live shows from New York onto 35mm kinescope films in Los Angeles for broadcast three hours later, and as you might expect there are tales of film-processing problems and other near-disasters that almost prevented the filmed show from getting on the air. Schneider was present at the inception of videotape, and describes the nightmarish conditions of the first tape-editing processes.

In this entertaining chronicle of a nerve-wracking business, Schneider recounts his 20-hour days in an industry where there's no such phrase as "I'm not ready." The technical aspects of the job are clearly explained, and the book is surprisingly light-hearted even when Schneider is recounting the unkindest cuts. (Available for \$38 postpaid from McFarland, Box 611, Jefferson NC 28640; (800) 253-2187.)

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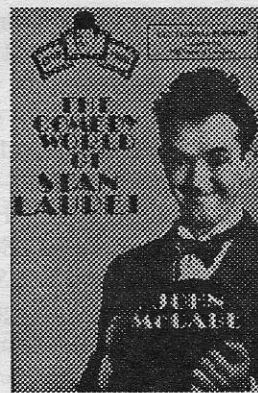
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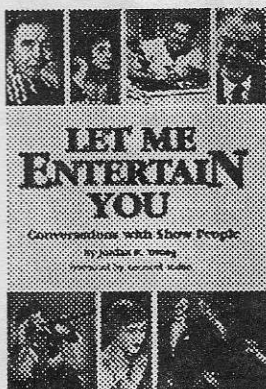
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Famous Newscasters From Radio's Golden Years

By Frank Bresee



During the formative years of radio, and into the forties and fifties, network newscasters ruled the world of news radio. One of the first was Boake Carter, until he spent too many hours in a local bar one evening, went by the sponsor's house and serenaded him late into the night. (He was replaced shortly after that.) In the early years Robert Trout, H.R. Baukage and Hans V. Kaltenborn were radio staples. So was Floyd Gibbons, who broadcast some

of the first "remote" news stories, live and on the spot.

Throughout the Thirties, the Forties and into the Fifties, Walter Winchell brought the hard news and the Hollywood news to listeners during his Sunday night 15 minute newscast; he was on various networks from August 1931 until March 1957. He once told me that he was the highest paid performer in show business at one time. He received \$15,000.00 for his 15 minute newscast - that's \$1,000 a minute.

During the Second World War, we listened to Elmer Davis, Drew Pearson (who often made predictions about newsmakers which, as his announcer noted in his introduction, "have proven to be 84 percent accurate!"), Gabriel Heatter (whose sign-on was "Ah, there's good news tonight!") and Robert Trout.

CBS newscaster Edward R. Morrow introduced his nightly newscast with "This—is London," and in the late '30s he helped Americans understand the full impact of the Nazis' brutality in Europe. Fulton Lewis Jr. was one of the most listened-to newsmen on Mutual, and Paul Harvey is the last (and certainly one of the best) of the regularly scheduled newscasters on radio. He continues to be heard to this day, on the coast- to-coast ABC radio network.



Left: Lowell Thomas with two microphones, provided by NBC to ensure that his newscast goes on even if one mic goes out. This was taken in July 1934, only four years into Thomas' 16-year tenure with NBC. Another 30 years would follow with CBS. Thomas loved to travel to remote corners of the globe, and for a while a feature of his program was "The Tall Tale Club."

The newscaster with the greatest longevity was Lowell Thomas. His first network newscast was on September 30, 1930, and he continued until May 1976. He spent 16 years at NBC and 30 at CBS, and also had the distinction of delivering the first televised newscast, for NBC in 1939. It was an amazing career; Thomas became one of the first radio reporters to regularly scoop the newspapermen, and NBC reportedly considered his broadcasts so important that two microphones were usually placed before him to ensure that the show would go on if one mike gave out.

Just before he retired, Mr. Thomas was on my *Golden Days of Radio* show, and he talked about his career: "Just to give you an idea of how far I go back in broadcasting -- I did my first solo broadcast on Pittsburgh station KDKA, in 1925. At that time Eric Sevareid was 13 years old; Howard K. Smith was 11; Walter Cronkite was 9; Mike Wallace 7; Edwin C. Newman 6; David Brinkley 5; and Harry Reasoner was 2. As for John Chancellor, Roger Mudd, Marvin Kalb, Robert Pierpoint, Dan Rather, Barbara Walters and so on --they hadn't even been born yet. And what does that mean? Not a darn thing—it only means the good Lord has been good to me!" Mr. Thomas also said he was looking forward to a few years off so he could spend time in Colorado skiing. And indeed he did. At 84 years old, you could find him on the slopes. He was one of the best.



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Pop Culture

Art Deco, and Where to Find It

Despite the ravages of time and the wrecking ball, there are still many vestiges of the Art Deco style of architecture all over the United States. Some of them survive quite splendidly, as depicted for us in **The National Trust Guide to Art Deco in America** by David Gebhard (Preservation Press; 278 pages, paperback; \$19.95).

The book also covers the "Streamline Moderne" style in this state-by-state survey of surviving structures originally built between 1920 and 1949. It's interesting to note that commercial and public buildings were constructed in this style by the thousands during those years, but homes continued to be built in more traditional styles such as Colonial Revival or the California ranch house.

In any event, Gebhard (who died in March 1996, just before this book was published) has provided a fine, concise history of Deco and Moderne (noting that the style's high point—and grand finale—was in buildings for the 1939 World's Fair). Sources of the style, among them science fiction comic strips, are noted, as are a few beautiful buildings that have been demolished (there's a heartbreaking shot of the old NBC radio studios that stood at Sunset and Vine in Hollywood). Because Deco was a style that oozed a dynamic modernism, Gebhard notes that the style "produced buildings that do not age well; their appearance suffers appreciably unless they are continually refurbished."

Still, most are an eyeful, as shown in the dozens of black and white photos. Gebhard divides the country by region and then by state, giving the address of each structure, the date it was built and its designer. There follows a colorful description of the building, such as this of a Greyhound Bus Terminal in New York: "Curved walls articulated with horizontal lines and banded windows paid homage to the Streamline Moderne and its evocations of speed." More than 500 buildings are listed, among them the Municipal Auditorium in Kansas City, Columbia High School in Columbia, Mississippi, an apartment building in Eureka, California and the Temple of Music in Milwaukee. (Available from John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 605 Third Avenue, New York NY 10158-0012.)

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Fond Farewells

The latest in a necessary if a rather saddening series of books is **Obituaries in the Performing Arts, 1996** by Harris M. Lentz III (McFarland; 244 pages, paperback; \$28.00 postpaid). While it's a bit of a downer to realize how many great talents of the past have passed on in only one year, one has to admit that Mr. Lentz has crafted a very useful volume. He casts a wide net over the topic, including not only actors, actresses, directors, writers and choreographers but also such folks as animator Virgil Ross, drama critic Walter Kerr, jazz disc jockey Willis Conover and and cinematographer John Alton.

The 540 people profiled range from stars to the obscure, most of them having spent the balance of their careers in the '30s through the early '50s. The amount of biographical detail varies, but most entries are more than adequate, with generous if not complete film and television credits included. Magazine and newspaper sources for further information are given after each entry. The 325 photos vary in quality, but include welcome shots of the lesser-known individuals. (Available from McFarland, Box 611, Jefferson NC 28640; (800) 253-2187.)

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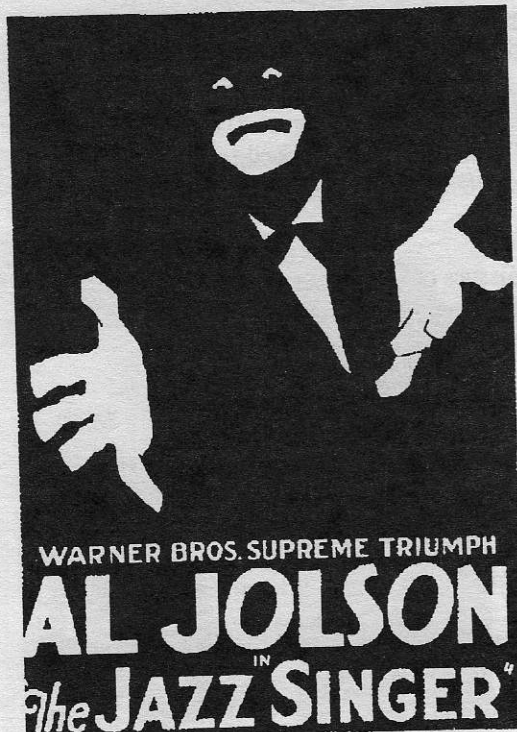
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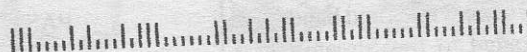
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