

Past Times

No. 29 THE NOSTALGIA ENTERTAINMENT NEWSLETTER \$5.00

Radio's Greats Tell Their Stories in New Book



Leonard Maltin's new book *The Great American Broadcast: A Celebration of Radio's Golden Age* (Dutton; 324 pages; \$36.95, hardcover) is something that's long overdue, a history of the radio industry which goes behind the scenes to show you how the classic shows made it to the airwaves. Mr. Maltin's ten years of research have paid off in a treasurable book chock-full of great stories from dozens of radio veterans.

The book is more concerned with describing the technical and creative processes of radio drama than in illustrating the effect they had on the listener, although Maltin does convey this about as well as anyone can on the printed page. A script excerpt from Irving Reis's "Meridian 7-1212" is a colorful example of how sparse dialogue and a few sound effects could create a vivid scene in the listener's imagination. It would have been nice to

see more script excerpts from varied shows throughout the book, but Maltin understandably has to keep the text briskly paced, since there's so much material to cover.

He excels at describing the unique expertise needed for radio acting, writing, directing, composing and commercial announcing. One especially vivid passage conveys the folksy approach that Ralph Edwards gave to Ivory Flakes commercials, in contrast to the formal and rather stuffy approach that was then the norm. Other topics, such as the connection between radio and the movies, sponsors, audiences, bloopers, and the hectic life of radio actors, are succinctly yet fully covered.

The human aspect of the industry comes through powerfully. The sense of community that developed between radio actors, their friendship and willingness to help each other, is conveyed time and again—certainly a different situation from that which prevailed in other branches of the entertainment industry.

Much of the story is told by radio's finest talents. Some were notoriously reluctant to be interviewed about old radio, including William Conrad and John McIntire, but thankfully Maltin prevailed, and they're well represented here. (Some of the radio greats who are long gone, such as Hans Conried, are also heard from in quotes from other sources, but most of the first-hand accounts printed here are exclusive.) Dozens of great stills further illustrate what life in the radio studios was like.

Trying to write a history of radio is like trying to get the entire history of movies into one volume—it's too much for any one book to bear. But Maltin has covered radio's heyday fully and colorfully, providing a wealth of material that no previous book has offered. As a chronicle of the American radio industry in its glory years, this volume is indispensable. (Available from bookstores, and from Radio Spirits: (800) RADIO-48.)

'30s Mini-Musicals on Video

Those of us who love old films and vintage music are doubly thrilled at Kino on Video's new four-volume set of musical short subjects, collectively titled *Hollywood Rhythm*. Currently, the series is available only on VHS cassettes, but Pioneer is scheduled to bring out a laserdisc edition within a few months. The four volumes are *Radio Rhythms*, *Jazz Cocktails*, *Blue Melodies* and *Rhapsodies in Black and Blue*. Each is available separately for \$24.95, with a boxed set of all four retailing for \$89.95.

Seven or eight shorts are included per volume, each running about 80 minutes. All are in black and white, and since they span a period from 1929 to 1941 they can vary greatly in technical quality. Rudy Vallee's *Radio Rhythm* and Ruth Etting's *Favorite Melodies* are pretty static; conversely, the 1935 Duke Ellington short *Symphony in Black* is superbly designed and directed, conveying the essence of the music with stylized sets, lighting and editing.

Most of these shorts were made for Paramount in the early '30s. (The main titles on existing negatives were replaced in the '50s, so they bear a "U.M.&M. TV Corp." copyright. However, most of the titles are designed to closely match the originals; Kino has also restored the opening Paramount logo on most entries.) Surprisingly, there are also a few independently-made films, such as Bessie Smith's *St. Louis Blues* and the impressionistic Duke Ellington short *Black and Tan*, both from 1929. A Soundie from 1941 of Fats Waller doing *Ain't Misbehavin'* is also here. (How nice it would be if the Leonard Maltin-produced series of *those* films were again available!)

The majority of these one and two-reelers were shot at Paramount's Astoria

Continued on Page 4

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Ernst Lubitsch on Video.....	3	The Tim-Tay-Shuns of Red Ingle.....	19
Bio Waterfall: Stars, Directors	7	Eddie Cantor in print, on CD.....	21
Astaire, Gershwin Film Music CDs..	9	Sherlock Holmes on U.S. Radio.....	22
1920s Bands on CD.....	11	Kovacs and Carney.....	27
What's Old on Audio.....	14	Radio's Big Farewell.....	30

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See Page 31

NOSTALGIA NEWSWIRE

Turner Classic Movies will continue to run nostalgic favorites in November. A month-long film festival will salute **Katharine Hepburn**, with titles ranging from her 1932 debut *A Bill of Divorcement* to the 1993 documentary *Katharine Hepburn: All About Me*. In January 1998, director **Busby Berkeley**, will be the subject of an original documentary, *Going Through the Roof*, which celebrates him as "the Father of the Music Video." (!) The hour-long show will premiere on January 26, following a marathon of Berkeley's films on Sunday, January 25.....Car manufacturers have suddenly been exhibiting much better taste in their TV commercials; **Louis Armstrong** can be heard in a spot for Infiniti, **Billie Holiday** sings for Jaguar, and **Marlene Dietrich** does "Falling in Love Again" for Mercedes-Benz. We've also heard **Judy Garland** doing "Get Happy" for Clinique/Happy perfume and **Ray Bolger**'s "If I Only Had a Brain" for Océ Copiers.....**Bob Hope**'s long-running contract with NBC may be over, but the 94-year-old comedian is still highly visible. He just signed a "six-figure" deal to appear in a commercial for K-Mart; he'll be profiled in a two-hour biographical special on cable's Arts & Entertainment network; and by decree of Congress, he'll soon be named as America's first honorary veteran, in gratitude for his hundreds of shows for servicemen here and overseas.....The smooth harmonies of the **Mills Brothers** live on—not only through the vocal group's fan club, which publishes a fine newsletter—but through the continuing appearances of **Donald Mills** (the last survivor of the original quartet) and his son, **John**. The duo have just signed for six months of appearances at the Fabulous Palm Springs Follies in downtown Palm Springs. Also appearing is singer **Kay Starr**—and a cast of singers, dancers and entertainers aged 51 to 84, who revive the glory of vaudeville. John and Donald Mills will be performing from November 5, 1997 through May 30, 1998, with a break from December 15 through the 25th. For further information on the Follies, call (619) 327-0225; for more information on the **Mills Brothers Society**, contact Daniel R. Clemson, 604 N. Market Street, Mechanicsburg PA 17055-2727.....Other clubs you may want to know about: **Club Crosby** c/o Wayne L. Martin, 435 S. Holmes Avenue, Kirkwood MO 63122; **Harry James Appreciation Society** c/o Jim Cutler, 3 Henry's Avenue, Woodford Green, Essex, UK IG8 9RB; **Perry Como Fan Club** c/o Martha Gerhard, 943 Crawford Street, Bethlehem PA 18017; **W.C. Fields Fan Club** c/o Ted Wioncek, P.O. Box 506, Stratford NJ 08084-0506; **International Al Jolson Society** c/o Bruce Wexler, 16 Silversmith Court, Howell NJ 07731; **Kate Smith Commemorative Society** c/o Rev. Raymond B. Wood, P.O. Box 368, Jamesville NY 13078; **New York Sheet Music Society** c/o Sam Teicher, P.O. Box 354, Hewlet NY 11557.....If you're a fan of **Our Gang** ("The Little Rascals" to those of the TV generation), you'll certainly remember **Shirley Jean**, the blonde little girl with the Louise Brooks hairdo. She's doing just fine, thanks, and has started a mail order catalog of Our Gang memorabilia. So far, she's offering photographs, a T-shirt with an original design, and a reproduced page from a rare Our Gang paper doll book. More items are promised in the future. For information, write to Shirley Jean Measures, P.O. Box 683, Botsford CT 06404; you can also contact her by e-mail at shirleyjean@worldnet.att.net.....The **Conrad Veidt Society** is still alive and well and honoring the memory of the German actor who worked in films as diverse as *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* and *Casablanca*. For more information on the Society (annual dues \$5.00), write to 2757 Eleventh Avenue, Sacramento CA 95818-4420.....Barry Manilow's new musical, *Harmony*, is about the **Comedian Harmonists**, a vocal sextet hugely popular in Germany in the '20s and '30s. The show is currently playing in La Jolla, California (ticket info: (619) 550-1010); two CDs are currently available of the group's original 78s.

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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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

Annie Laurie (Rare 1927 MGM Lillian Gish feature with two-strip Technicolor sequence), James Bridges Theatre/UCLA, Los Angeles CA, November 18. Info: (213) 937-0776. Also at Bridges Theatre/UCLA, November 13: *The Mark of Zorro*, 1940 Tyrone Power swashbuckler in 35mm nitrate print. Info: (310) 206-FILM.

Jack Benny Holiday Classics: Three half-hour TV shows from 1952-57 with a Christmas or New Year's theme. Academy of Television Arts & Sciences, North Hollywood CA, December 3. Info: (310) 206-8014; RSVP by December 1.

Cinerama Screenings in true three-projector system: *This is Cinerama* on November 15, *How the West Was Won* on November 16. The New Neon Movies, 130 E. 5th St., Dayton OH. (937) 222-8452; www.erinet.com/newneon

MUSIC EVENTS & FESTIVALS

San Diego Thanksgiving Dixieland Jazz Festival, Mission Valley CA, November 27-30. Info: (619) 297-5277.

Mid-America Jazz Festival, St. Louis MO, March 13-15, 1998. Guests include clarinetist Peanuts Hucko in a tribute to Benny Goodman. Info: (314) 469-0255.

Suncoast Dixieland Jazz Classic, Clearwater Beach, FL, November 21-23. Guests include Spigle Willcox, trombonist from the legendary 1920s Jean Goldkette Orchestra. Info: (813) 536-0064.

Big Band Transatlantic Cruise Featuring Tommy Dorsey Orchestra, April 24-May 5, 1998. Eleven day cruise from Ft. Lauderdale, FL to Lisbon, Portugal. Info: Jazzsea Cruises, (800) 323-3881.

OLD-TIME RADIO/TV EVENTS

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

COLLECTIBLES SHOWS & EVENTS

Big D Collectibles Show, Dallas TX, November 7-9. Info: (817) 261-8745

Hollywood Memorabilia & Celebrities Show, Rosemont IL, November 15-16. Guests include Margaret O'Brien. Also in N. Hollywood CA, January 17-18. Info on both events: (352) 683-5110; www.HollywoodCollectorShow.com

4th Annual Movie Memorabilia Convention, Park Central Hotel, New York NY, November 30. More than 130 dealers with posters, stills, autographs. Info: (216) 781-1821.

Wayne Nostalgia & Collectibles Show, Clifton NJ, December 7. Info: (201) 742-2647.

Movies

Happy Birthday, Gene!

The past couple of years have seen a happy acknowledgement of a man who became a hero to several generations of kids, and deservedly so. Gene Autry's an actor and singer with a captivating, easygoing charm; he's a greatly talented songwriter; he invented the "Singing Cowboy" brand of Western movies; he was a top star in films, recordings, radio and TV; and his endeavors outside of show business have paid off handsomely, too. He's remained a true gentleman, exemplifying the finest ideals.



To mark the 90th birthday of the gent from Tioga, Texas, the Varèse Sarabande label has issued two new Autry collections on CDs and cassettes, *The Singing Cowboy* (Chapter

One) (VSD-5840) and *Gene Autry With the Legendary Singing Groups of the West* (VSD-5841). Each album has 16 songs, taken directly from the soundtracks of Gene's films. The first collection has the title songs from well-remembered Autry pictures such as *Tumbling Tumbleweeds*, *Down Mexico Way* and *Guns and Guitars*. The Singing Groups featured in the second album include the Sons of the Pioneers, the Cass County Boys, and Smiley Burnette with the original Beverly Hillbillies.

Both packages are beautifully illustrated with original poster artwork; the booklets are fully annotated and include a new message from Gene. The sound quality varies from excellent to fair (understandably, since vintage B-Westerns didn't always have superior sound recording); the only really nasty transfer is "The Old Home Place," with a pronounced cyclical shift in the volume level. Chances are that Autry's legion of fans will forgive these flaws and will greatly enjoy these souvenirs of many a Saturday matinee. (Available on CD for \$13.98 each or cassette for 9.98 each from Varèse Sarabande, 1-800-VARESE-4.)

Jeanette MacDonald (in her film debut), who is under pressure to marry. Soon, he is prince consort and locked in a battle of the sexes with his Queen. Lupino Lane and Lillian Roth offer fine support as the secondary couple, Chevalier's valet and the Queen's chambermaid. Jeanette's "Dream Lover" is the hit, but Lane and Roth have plenty of places to shine in such numbers as "Let's Be Common."

Monte Carlo has Jack Buchanan as a Count incognito as a hairdresser in pursuit of runaway bride Jeanette. Critics often lament that Buchanan is somewhat prissy and asexual compared to the virile Chevalier, but he brings his own charm to the role and acquits himself nicely with the ballads "Always, in All Ways" and "Give Me a Moment, Please." Jeanette is memorable warbling "Beyond the Blue Horizon" from a train window, as toilers in passing fields join in the chorus.

One Hour With You is a musical remake of Lubitsch's silent classic, *The Marriage Circle*. Maurice Chevalier and Jeanette MacDonald are the happily married couple who are, nonetheless, not above straying from the Marriage Contract. Charles Ruggles, Genevieve Tobin and Roland Young offer fine support in this sexy, saucy romp. Young George Cukor was originally signed to direct, but Lubitsch took over when Cukor's work proved unsatisfactory. Nonetheless, Cukor gets credit as assistant director.

The Smiling Lieutenant is the rarity of the box. This musical, which was nominated for Best Picture of 1931-32 by the Motion Picture Academy, was believed lost for many years before a print was found in the Danish Film Archive and preserved by UCLA. Despite its rarity, the print quality is superb. This time, Claudette Colbert and Miriam Hopkins are rivals for the attentions of the title character played by Maurice Chevalier. Songs include "Toujours L'Amour in the Army," "Breakfast Table Love," and the film's best number, "Jazz Up Your Lingerie" (performed as a duet by Colbert and Hopkins).

Trouble In Paradise is regarded as Lubitsch's masterpiece. Herbert Marshall and Miriam Hopkins play jewel thieves out to fleece rich Kay Francis in this story that

Lubitsch Classics on Laser

By Rob Ray

After years of bemoaning Universal Home Video's indifference to its extensive catalog of pre-1950 Paramount features, we are pleased to announce that Universal and Image Home Entertainment have released *The Lubitsch Touch* (Universal Studios Home Video 43226; \$189.99), a beautiful box set containing nearly all of director Ernst Lubitsch's classic gems from his golden period at Paramount. Specifically, the set covers his talkie period from 1929 to 1933. Only his sole drama, *The Man I Killed*, and his contributions to *Paramount On Parade* have been omitted. But what's here is luminous indeed!

Ernst Lubitsch was unparalleled in creating a series of saucy, sophisticated sex comedies that never crossed the line into questionable taste, but certainly cast a sly wink in that direction. His sure handling of such delicate topics as mutual infidelity and thievery among the moneyed classes came to be known as the Lubitsch Touch, and prime examples of that style are on display here.

After a highly successful career directing silent classics such as *The Marriage Circle*, *Lady Windermere's Fan* and *The Student Prince In Old Heidelberg*, Lubitsch effortlessly made the transition to talkies with the first feature on display here, *The Love Parade*, and demonstrated that sound only enhanced his abilities to depict the joys of pursuing the opposite sex.

The Love Parade features continental roué Maurice Chevalier as a military attaché for the Queen,

Continued on Page 4

Kino's *Hollywood Rhythm* a Musical Feast

Continued from Page 1

studio in Queens (still in operation, by the way). They may not be as technically polished as the Hollywood product, but they afford us a look at many personalities who were primarily based in New York. Ethel Merman, fresh from her Broadway triumph in *Girl Crazy*, is seen in three shorts—including the genuinely strange *Be Like Me* (Ethel caught in a South American revolution!) and the even stranger *Her Future* (Merman pleading her case in song to a vindictive judge whose courtroom is straight out of *The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*). In the 1929 *Makers of Melody*, Rodgers and Hart prove that as actors, they're great songwriters—but it's a priceless film nevertheless. Another pair of songwriters, Mack Gordon and Harry Revel, star in the 1935 *Hollywood Rhythm*. Gordon is hysterically funny as he slyly parodies the premise of the short with an intentionally hammy performance.

Jazz is the primary brand of music being served, sometimes coming from surprising sources: the "commercial" band of Vincent Lopez does a terrific ten-minute arrangement of "St. Louis Blues" in 1932's *Those Blues*. Besides Ellington and Waller, Cab Calloway appears in two shorts (the wonderful *Hi-De-Ho* and the less inventive *Jitterbug Party*) and Louis Armstrong is in the invaluable *Rhapsody in Black and Blue* (1932), triumphant over a script that has some less than flattering images of Blacks. The same holds for *Ol' King Cotton*, starring the majestic baritone George Dewey Washington. Bing Crosby dons blackface for a sequence in *Dream House* which is apt to induce a cringe or two.

But this is a fine series, filled with surprises: a 19-year-old Billie Holiday needing only a few minutes to work her magic in *Symphony in Black*; an impossibly young Ginger Rogers as a frustrated secretary with the *Office Blues*, three years before she'd film with Fred; a young English actor named Cary Grant making his (unbilled) movie debut with singer Anna Chang in *Singapore Sue*. The print quality is generally very good. Some shorts, such as *Office Blues*, have very slight letterboxing to retain the full image area. Most appear to be from 35mm materials; Merman's *Her Future* seems to be alternately drawn from 35mm and 16mm sources. The non-Paramount items, *St. Louis Blues*, *Black and Tan* and *Ain't Misbehavin'*, are in fair-to-good shape, standard for these films. We hope that Kino will produce more musical-short collections; there's still a wealth of fascinating material out there. In the meantime, *Hollywood Rhythm* is a musical and visual feast. (Available from Kino on Video, 333 West 39th Street, New York NY 10018; (212) 629-6880.)

An Eloquent Plea for Film Preservation

Next time you're in the mood to watch a classic silent film, you might try to find the famous Theda Bara version of *Cleopatra*—or Greta Garbo's feature *The Divine Woman*; maybe Lon Chaney in *London After Midnight*.

But you won't find them. They're all missing, lost (probably) forever because of the highly unstable nitrate film stock that they, and all films prior to 1952, were printed on. You can, however, watch the Frank Capra classic *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, the first three-strip Technicolor feature *Becky Sharp*, and Buster Keaton's magnificent short *The Boat*—yet all of these were saved just in the nick of time. Even with the reawakening of interest in old films—and the new profitability of them—brought about by cable television and home video, we can't be complacent about old films. As shown by Tom McGreevey and Joanne L. Yeck in their vitally important new book **Our Movie Heritage** (Rutgers University Press; 208 pages, hardcover; \$45.00) even classic films readily available on video and cable TV are not always preserved in 35mm sources.

This large, lavishly illustrated book makes a passionate case for the cause of film preservation, describing what's irretrievably lost, explaining why film deteriorates, and outlining the history of film preservation. The 140 illustrations include gorgeous stills from rare and classic films, but also take us to the labs and archives where film preservation takes place, and introduces us to the soldiers in the preservation battle.

There are some real horror stories here—Columbia hastily transferring its classic films to safety stock in the '50s, then destroying the nitrate negatives, for one example. There are many success stories, too, but the cost of preserving films has escalated alarmingly, while funding has shrunk. This book is an essential reminder of how important our movie heritage is, and how we need to be vigilant in sustaining it. (Rutgers University Press, Bldg. 4161, P.O. Box 5062, New Brunswick NJ 08903.)



Saucy, Sophisticated Lubitsch Comedies on Laserdisc

Continued from Page 3

epitomizes the phrase "sophisticated comedy." Character comedians Edward Everett Horton and Charles Ruggles are at the peak of their powers in this jewel of a film.

Design For Living was a very loose adaptation of the play by Noel Coward. In fact, over half of the movie depicts action that occurs before the curtain rises on the stage version. Gary Cooper and Fredric March are both in love with Miriam Hopkins, who plays up to both of them, to the point of agreeing that all three should live together "with no sex!" You can take it from there.

Finally, this definitive box set includes a brief segment that Lubitsch directed for the episodic film, *If I Had A Million*. It's a priceless bit with Charles Laughton. To say more would ruin a great 90 second clip.

All the films are presented in beautifully sharp prints, many courtesy of UCLA's world-renowned preservation project. The set comes with a luxurious 4 page insert containing a thorough essay on Lubitsch's life and career by Scott Eyman, the author of *Ernst Lubitsch: Laughter In Paradise* as well as *The Speed Of Sound: Hollywood And The Talkie Revolution*. The box is sturdy, all discs come in lined paper sleeves and each film has nearly 30 well-placed chapter stops. The sound is digitally encoded, with CX encoding on the analog tracks. All the films sound great, considering the age of the materials. In addition, *One Hour With You* contains various tints; it and *The Love Parade* have lengthy exit music.

The outside jacket notes contain a couple of inexcusable casting errors, erroneously claiming that Maurice Chevalier is in *Monte Carlo* and Jeanette MacDonald in *The Smiling Lieutenant*. In addition, the jacket leads one to believe that *If I Had A Million* is completely contained in the box set, when only Lubitsch's 90 second segment is included. These flaws aside, this is a superb package. Bruce Venezia of Image Entertainment, who's worked for ten years to make this set a reality, deserves our thanks.

A Wealth of Classic and Obscure Vintage Films On New Laserdiscs

By Rob Ray

One of our favorite box sets was MGM/UA's *Forbidden Hollywood Collection*, featuring several films made before the Production Code clamped down on the raciness common to films of the early '30s. Another seven pre-Code films (*Illicit*, *The Strange Love of Molly Louvain*, *Beauty and the Boss*, *Big Business Girl*, *They Call it Sin*, *Havana Widows* and *I've Got Your Number*) have been grouped as the **Forbidden Hollywood Collection II** (MGM/UA ML105197; \$139.98). These Warner Bros.-First National titles feature the terrific Warner Bros. stock company, including Barbara Stanwyck, Warren William, Loretta Young, Joan Blondell, Glenda Farrell, Frank McHugh and Allen Jenkins. The last-named four, along with Guy Kibbee, are most of the cast of *Havana Widows*, a wonderfully funny and fast-paced romp. *Beauty and the Boss* is also fun, thanks to the histrionics of Warren William and the comedy relief of Charles Butterworth.

Illicit has a low-fidelity early talkie soundtrack, and the print is blurred and watermarked. The other six films have excellent picture and sound quality, however. The films are spread over five discs, with a film often starting in the middle of a side. Trailers are included for *Illicit*, *Big Business Girl*, *Beauty and the Boss* and *Havana Widows*. There is a one-page insert containing only the chapter stop listings.

Jezebel, *Dark Victory* and *Mr. Skeffington*, three films which were previously released individually, have been substantially improved, remastered and boxed together as **The Best Of Bette Davis** (MGM/UA ML105226). In addition, 80 minutes of trailers for most of Bette's Warners films are included, with early rarities like *The Man Who Played God*, *Three on a Match* and *Satan Met a Lady* represented along with classics such as *The Letter*. Each film is contained on a separate platter in this four disc set. *Mr. Skeffington* is spread across three sides, the last of which concludes with the first of the trailers. A one-page insert contains just the chapter stop listings.

Lady in the Lake (MGM/UA ML102250; \$39.95), Robert Montgomery's self-directed journey to Philip Marlowe-land, has the distinction of being shot from Marlowe's point of view (we only see him in mirrors). The print looks and sounds fine; there are 24 chapter stops, but no theatrical trailer.

Spencer Tracy, Hedy Lamarr and John Garfield star as the denizens of **Tortilla Flat** (MGM/UA ML101126; \$39.95) in this adaptation of the John Steinbeck novel. Frank Morgan has one of the best roles of his career as a benevolent dog lover with a secret mission. The disc looks and sounds fine, and contains 26 chapter stops. There is no theatrical trailer, even though there would have been plenty of room for one.

Gabriel Over the White House (MGM/UA ML103911; \$39.95) is certainly one of the strangest films you'll ever see. Walter Huston is a crooked politician who, after being elected President, has a profound spiritual reawakening, which may be due to the intervention of the Archangel Gabriel! Assistants Karen Morley and Franchot Tone are puzzled by all the changes going on. In some ways, it's quite similar to Kevin Kline's hit of a few years back, *Dave*, except that Huston becomes a virtual dictator. This film is a fascinating time capsule which shows that some of the political notions being suggested in 1933 are, in retrospect, pretty frightening. There's no trailer, a situation now the norm with MGM/UA.

Charles Laughton, Robert Young and Margaret O'Brien star in the wartime fantasy **The Canterville Ghost** (MGM/UA ML101873; \$39.95). Laughton, in the title role, is a spirit from the 17th Century who's unable to fully ascend into the spirit world until Young helps him perform an act of heroism. A supporting cast including Mike Mazurki, Rags Ragland, Reginald Owen and Una O'Connor adds some sparkle. The print looks and sounds fine; there's no trailer, but there are 20 chapter stops.

Alice Faye is caught up in a hackneyed mistaken identity plotline in **The Gang's All Here** (20th Century Fox Home Entertainment 0182080; \$39.95) involving her new soldier boyfriend and his ex-fiancee. No matter. With Benny Goodman, Edward Everett Horton, Charlotte Greenwood, and Carmen Miranda with that infamous tutti-frutti hat, you'll go along for a silly but entertaining ride. The score includes such jaw-dropping songs as "Paducah" (sung by Goodman) and "A Journey to a Star" (croaked at one point by Eugene Pallette!) Director Busby Berkeley runs riot with a dizzying display of Technicolor, which thankfully is present in all its blazing glory here; the sound is fine too. The disc comes with 25 chapter stops and the original trailer.

Call Northside 777 (20th Century Fox Home Entertainment 0855480; \$39.95) is a slightly fictionalized telling of a true story. It concerns a newspaper reporter's crusade to prove a convicted murderer's innocence. The adventure begins with an ad placed in the newspaper by the murderer's mother, posting a reward for information on finding the true killers. The disc has 28 chapter stops, including one for the trailer and one for Movietone News coverage of the premiere. The outstanding liner notes give an overview of the true story, as well as a history of the making of the film.

The Hal Roach Studios, long known for releasing classic comedies, tried serious drama with **Of Mice and Men** (Image Entertainment/Corinth Films ID3787CO; \$39.99). This adaptation of the stage play based on the Steinbeck novel was one of the best films of 1939. The late Burgess Meredith plays George, who must face the most difficult challenge of his life when confronted with the actions of his simple-minded companion, Lenny. Lon Chaney turns in the best performance of his career in the latter role. This film has never looked nicer than it does on this laserdisc. Blessedly, there seems to be no digital enhancement of the soundtrack. Optical noise is present, but the dialogue is so crisp and clear you won't mind it a bit. There are 26 chapter stops, and informative liner notes.

You get more Stan & Ollie for your money with **Laurel & Hardy and Friends Vol. 8** (Image Entertainment NAL3340; \$39.95) than with previous volumes. This one has two fine silent L&H shorts, *The Finishing Touch* and *Leave 'em Laughing* in generally excellent print quality (which varies shot by shot from pristine 35mm sources to pretty good 16mm materials). L&H also make a cameo appearance in *The Stolen Jools*, a short made for charity which boasts an amazing cast of early '30s stars. The hilarious Charley Chase silent *Bromo & Juliet*, with Hardy in the cast, has only fair picture quality. Two enjoyable Edgar Kennedy two-reelers—*Radio Rampage* and *The Big Beef*—are from fair-to-good 16mm sources; Charlie Hall's stint as a fix-it man in *Rampage* is a highlight. There's one chapter stop per film.

Continued on Page 6

Laserdisc Roundup

Continued from Page 5

A terrific blend of comedy and shivers can be found in **The Cat and the Canary** (Image Entertainment ID3749DS; \$39.99), with heiress Laura LaPlante spending the night in a spooky old house. The cast includes Tully Marshall, Creighton Hale, Gertrude Astor, Lucien Littlefield and Flora Finch, with the atmospheric direction by Paul Leni. This disc, produced by David Shepard, is evidently mastered from 16mm sources; the picture is slightly soft, but very watchable. The print is nicely tinted and has an excellent score; the packaging includes some very informative liner notes. Also included is a beautiful print of Harold Lloyd's short *Haunted Spooks*. There are 21 chapter stops, including 6 for the short.

The 1921 silent feature **Tol'able David** (Image ID1998DS; \$39.99), starring Richard Barthelmess as a country boy who's confronted by three convicts, looks great for its age in this disc produced by David Shepard. The score is compiled and composed by Robert Israel, and performed by a small orchestra under his direction. The print is tinted, and the disc includes a video interview with the film's director, Henry King. There are 20 chapter stops, including 4 for the King interview. The jacket has informative liner notes by Walter Coppedge.

Some animation buffs have complained about digital-restoration artifacts on the Republic Home Video box sets **Betty Boop: The Definitive Collection Vol. 1** (Republic 28070) and **Vol. 2** (28079; \$99.98 each). However, after viewing many of the 115 cartoons, which include all of Ms. Boop's epics along with several other Fleischer-produced shorts, our only complaint was that some of the films were cropped a bit tightly. The original titles have been replaced by "U.M. & M." titles made for TV repackaging, no fault of Republic's. Picture and sound are very sharp and clear, with a full grayscale for these black and white classics. The early '30s cartoons are wildly imaginative; after 1934, they become much more conventional, but they're still fun.

MOVIE MAGAZINES ('30s-'70s)

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Auguste and Louis Lumière

Illuminating Cinema's Birth

If you love vintage foreign films, they don't get any more vintage than **The Lumière Brothers' First Films**, newly released on VHS (Kino on Video; \$49.95). This marvelous collection includes the very first movie ever made—a film of workers leaving the Lumière factory, shot on March 19, 1895. The 62 minute compilation contains 85 films, all of them shot in a single take and running no more than 50 seconds each.

You might think these films would be incredibly antique, surviving only in tattered and disintegrating prints, and only mildly entertaining. Not so: the pictorial quality of these century-old films is stunning—razor sharp, with a full range of gray tones and a remarkable depth of focus. The composition of each shot/film is very inventive, too; many of them have several "layers" of activity going on simultaneously. Others are dynamic, framing the action diagonally to emphasize motion, such as *The Arrival of a Train at La Ciotat*.

Some of the films are documentaries, others are staged for the camera as the first fictional films. (Among these is "Sprinkler and Sprinkled," the first comedy film, in which a man watering a lawn is befuddled by a mischievous kid stepping on the garden hose.) The video is divided into nine thematic sections, including "French Having Fun," "Gags and Comedies" and "The World, Nearby," which has some fascinating footage of London, Venice, Berlin, New York, Chicago, Jerusalem and Moscow at the turn of the century.

Stuart Oderman, longtime pianist for the Museum of Modern Art, provides a graceful accompaniment, to these films, which were assembled by Thierry Fremaux. The narrator is film director Bertrand Tavernier (*Coup de Torchon*, *'Round Midnight*), and he's the perfect escort for this tour of the cinema's earliest adventures. Very well-versed in movie history and naturally funny, Tavernier helps us understand the innovations occurring before our eyes, providing lots of wry humor along with the history lesson. It's amazing to see how fully the language of movies developed long before Griffith—and even before Edwin S. Porter. The price of this tape is a little steep, but it's absolutely worth it. Thank you, Auguste and Louis Lumière. (Kino on Video, 333 West 39th St., New York NY 10018; (800) 562-3330; www.kino.com)

France may have been the birthplace of the movies, but it didn't remain the film capital of the world. An exhaustive look at how American moviemakers came to dominate the screens of the whole globe is provided in **American Films Abroad** by Kerry Segrave (McFarland; 366 pages, hardcover; \$45). In 1896, American movies began making their mark when director Edwin S. Porter started hawking Edison's films to exhibitors in the West Indies and South America (seven years before he'd make *The Great Train Robbery!*).

In 1916, the domestic studios received a major windfall when American consuls were ordered by the government to report in detail on their respective markets for U.S. movies. This information became available to the major studios, which quickly established a virtual cartel. The World War meant a severe shortage of European films, while American product poured in. The popularity of American film stars meant that foreign exhibitors were forced to endure block booking (they had to take unwanted films in order to get the handful they desired), a practice which also prevailed at home.

American studios consolidated their position of dominance in the '20s, hiring away the most talented foreign directors and stars, and sending the most popular personalities on worldwide publicity tours (Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks made seven trips abroad to meet their fans, which were underwritten by the State Department.) Segrave details how the European industries fought back with such measures as the "Quota Quickies" (German distributors in the '20s, for example, had to make available one German film for every American picture they imported; as a result, many German-made films were never exhibited—they were made solely to procure an import license.)

There are some real eye-openers here—such as Louis B. Mayer's authorizing the supply of MGM prints for the personal use of Hitler and Mussolini right up to the beginning of World War II. Very well researched and annotated, Segrave's study sheds much light on an aspect of the Hollywood studios not often discussed. (McFarland & Co., Box 611 Jefferson NC 28640; (800) 253-2187.)

Bio Waterfall: Stars and Directors Profiled in a Batch of Biographies

He might best be remembered as the man who played Abraham Lincoln in *The Birth of a Nation*, but Joseph Henabery had a fascinating career besides that explosive moment, as he details in **Before, In and After Hollywood** (Scarecrow Press; 392 pages, hardcover; \$55.00). This book, completed in manuscript form shortly before Henabery's 1976 death at the age of 88 and edited by Anthony Slide, provides an insider's account of the silent era. Henabery was an invaluable assistant to D.W. Griffith, working as writer, makeup man, mechanic, architect, scenic designer, special effects man and photographer as well as acting and directing. About 90 pages are devoted to the days with Griffith (which included work on *The Birth* and *Intolerance*); afterwards, Henabery made films with Fatty Arbuckle, Douglas Fairbanks and Valentino. A bout with tuberculosis briefly sidelined his career, but Henabery came back in the '30s as a prolific director of shorts for Vitaphone. This straightforward account of a remarkable life is illuminating, funny and poignant, and Henabery's comments on filmmaking prove that he knew his business. (Scarecrow Press, P.O. Box 191, Blue Ridge Summit PA 17214-0191; (800) 462-6420.)

Another Griffith alumnus became known as "America's Sweetheart," but she was of Canadian origin and was, for over a decade, the whole world's sweetheart. In **Pickford: The Woman Who Made Hollywood** (Kentucky; 442 pages, hardcover; \$25.00), Eileen Whitfield creates a compelling portrait of a woman who was not only a far more inventive actress than history has recalled, but the first female movie mogul. From the beginning, she wanted control over her movies and her finances, and she certainly achieved both goals, forming her own production company at Paramount and ultimately co-founding United Artists. Ms. Whitfield is balanced, seeing Pickford neither as heroine nor shrew, but as a talented, bright and often bedeviled woman. The artistic triumphs, business innovations and personal tragedies are all movingly detailed in this perceptive and eloquent book.



Pickford retired from the screen at 40 and remained semi-retired for the next 47 years. Conversely, Marie Dressler was in show business from the age of 14 until she died at 65, and her last five years were unquestionably the brightest of her career. The sixty-year prelude was pretty fascinating, too, as shown in Betty Lee's **Marie Dressler: The Unlikeliest Star**

(Kentucky; 344 pages, hardcover; \$25.00). Weighing around 200 pounds for most of her adult life and having (as she described it) "the face of a bulldog," Dressler began her theater career in the 1880s, wanting to be a tragedienne but realizing that she had a gift for making 'em laugh. She conquered Broadway, then moved to London to produce a show—which flopped. Flat broke, Dressler got the starring part in *Tillie's Nightmare*, a resounding success. When the Great War broke out, she campaigned tirelessly on bond drives. She also took up the cause of better wages for Broadway chorus members—which may explain why she could hardly get a job for the next eight years. In 1927, she got a break from her screenwriter friend Frances Marion, who wanted her for MGM's *The Callahans and the Murphys*. Other films followed, with a breakout success in

1931's *Anna Christie*. Her next role, in *Min and Bill*, earned her the Oscar for Best Actress, and Marie became a top star, but a cancer diagnosis cut short her comeback after a handful of films. Drawing largely on Dressler's unpublished memoirs and a recently discovered manuscript by her personal assistant, Lee has also contributed her own research and brings to life a resilient woman with a unique talent. (Both of the above available from University Press of Kentucky, 663 South Limestone Street, Lexington KY 40508-4008)

An actor with a somewhat longer spell in the spotlight is celebrated in **Pieces of Time: The Life of James Stewart** by Gary Fishgall (Scribner; 416 pages, hardcover; \$27.50). Fishgall outlines the life of the mild-mannered lad from Indiana, Pennsylvania who made good as an actor, served his country admirably, married late but remained a devoted husband, and finally became a beloved institution. It's an affectionate book, bolstered by dozens of interviews with personal and professional associates. It's not a very revealing one, though, mainly because Jimmy Stewart basically was the honorable, admirable guy that the public loved. It would have been nice to read more about how Stewart continued to grow as an actor and to determine just why he had such a hold on his public for so many years. But the research is impressive, and Fishgall keeps the story moving well.

The title of the latest book about Katharine Hepburn and Spencer Tracy sounds familiar—**An Affair to Remember** (William Morrow; 336 pages, hardcover; \$24.00)—and for that matter, so does much of the book. Written a bit breathlessly by Christopher Andersen, it concentrates on the most sensational aspects of the actors' lives prior to their meeting (Tracy's drinking binges, Hepburn's romances with Leland Hayward and Howard Hughes). The book is nearly half over before the two begin making their first picture together, *Woman of the Year*; many of the subsequent adventures recounted will be familiar to those who've read Garson Kanin's *Tracy and Hepburn*, and other stories (Tracy's impotence) may be more than the reader wants to know. However, Andersen has unearthed an impressive amount of detail about a 27-year romance that was, at least ostensibly, a secret. The author has interviewed Hepburn on many occasions, as well as scores of Tracy and Hepburn associates. If this volume is a little too gossipy for our tastes, it's admittedly never dull.

It's surprising that there hasn't until now been a full biography of such a highly-regarded director, but Todd McCarthy's new **Howard Hawks: The Grey Fox of Hollywood** (Grove Press; 756 pages, hardcover; \$35) is a first-rate job. Hawks was the most versatile of directors, making wonderful pictures as diverse as *Red River*, *The Big Sleep*, *Bringing Up Baby*, *Scarface* and *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*—and perhaps because he never became identified with any one type of movie, he didn't register in the public's memory as forcefully as Hitchcock or Capra. His films share a fast pace and a masculine sense of humor—and Hawks himself lived a colorful life. Born into a well-to-do family, Hawks was a pampered child and developed a fondness for fast cars, gambling and pretty women. His career, spanning from the Teens through 1970, is painstakingly documented, as is his private life. This is no little accomplishment, since Hawks was, like many directors, happy to spin colorful anecdotes but loathe to really talk about his art or his inner self. This is a story just about as rich and enjoyable as a good Hawks movie. (Available in bookstores.)

What's Old on Video: New and Forthcoming on VHS, Laserdisc and DVD

Remember a couple of issues ago, when we wondered if vintage films would be readily available on the new DVD format? The situation looks as though it will be a good one; MGM/UA, Lumivision, Image, Universal and other distributors are already releasing a number of old films—classic and obscure—on DVD. Stay tuned!

VHS:

The Bigamist (Ida Lupino) Kino on Video
 Bon Voyage / Aventure Malgache (World War II Hitchcock rarities; repriced at \$24.95) Milestone
 The Danny Kaye Giftset Collection (*Up in Arms, Wonder Man, Kid From Brooklyn, Secret Life of Walter Mitty, A Song is Born, Hans Christian Andersen*) HBO Video \$80.00
 The Eddie Cantor Giftset Collection (*Whoopie!, Roman Scandals, Kid Millions, Palmy Days, The Kid From Spain, Strike Me Pink*) HBO Video \$80.00
 The Frank Capra Collection (*Lady For a Day, A Hole in the Head, Pocketful of Miracles*) MGM/UA
 The Hitchhiker (Ida Lupino) Kino on Video
 Hollywood Rhythm (Four-volume series of '30s musical shorts: *Radio Rhythms, Jazz Cocktails, Blue Melodies, Rhapsodies in Black & Blue*; available singly or in box set) Kino on Video
 The Humphrey Bogart Collection (*Casablanca, Key Largo, The Big Sleep*—the "director's cut," making its video debut) MGM/UA
 Kiss Me Deadly (Ralph Meeker) MGM/UA
 The Lost World (repriced at \$24.95) Milestone
 The Lumiere Brothers' First Films Kino on Video
 M (Peter Lorre) Homevision
 Not Wanted (Ida Lupino) Kino on Video
 Paths of Glory (Kirk Douglas) MGM/UA
 Pride and Prejudice (Greer Garson) MGM/UA
 Sleeping Beauty Disney
 Sorrowful Jones/Paleface (Bob Hope two-pack) Universal Home Video
 Stairway to Heaven (David Niven) Columbia/Tri-Star
 Three Coins in the Fountain (Clifton Webb) Fox
 Wild Bill: Hollywood Maverick (Documentary on director William Wellman) Kino on Video
 Woman of the Year (Tracy/Hepburn) MGM/UA

Laserdiscs:

Animal Kingdom (Myrna Loy) Roan Group
 The Bat Roan Group
 Bells of San Angelo Roan Group
 Bette Davis Collection (*Jezebel, Dark Victory, Mr. Skeffington*, 80 minutes of trailers) MGM/UA
 Betty Boop: Definitive Collection Vol. 1 Republic
 Betty Boop: Definitive Collection Vol. 2 Republic
 Borderline/Cause for Alarm Roan Group
 Call Northside 777 Fox Video
 Canterville Ghost (ML 101873; \$39.95) MGM/UA
 The Cat and the Canary Image Entertainment
 Cecil B. DeMille The Greatest Showman on Earth (*Carmen, Joan the Woman, The Whispering Chorus, Male and Female, Volga Boatman*) Image Entertainment
 Colonel Effingham's Raid Roan Group
 Day the Earth Stood Still 20th Century-Fox Home Entertainment
 D.O.A. Roan Group
 Esther Williams Collection (*Thrill of Romance, On an Island With You, Pagan Love Song*) MGM/UA
 Forbidden Hollywood II (*Illicit, Strange Love of Molly Louvain, Beauty and the Boss, They Call it Sin, Havana Widows, The Easiest Way*) MGM/UA
 Fun and Fancy Free Disney
 Gabriel Over the White House MGM/UA
 Gang's All Here, The (0182080; \$39.95) Fox Video
 Garbo Silents (Love, Wild Orchids, The Torrent) MGM/UA
 The Ghoul (Karloff) Image Entertainment
 A Guy Named Joe MGM/UA
 The Hitchhiker (collector's edition) Roan Group
 Hollywood Rhythm: Paramount Jazz Shorts Pioneer
 Impact Roan Group
 Interrupted Melody MGM/UA
 Jamaica Inn Image Entertainment
 Kennel Murder Case / Nancy Drew, Detective / Dick Tracy Vs. Cueball Roan Group
 Kiss Me Deadly (with alternate ending) MGM/UA
 Lady in the Lake MGM/UA
 Laurel & Hardy and Friends Vol. 8 (*Finishing Touch, Leave 'em Laughing, Bromo & Juliet, two Edgar Kennedy shorts*) Image Entertainment
 Lili MGM/UA
 Lon Chaney Collection (*Where East is East, He Who Gets Slapped, The Unknown*) MGM/UA
 Lost in a Harem/Rio Rita MGM/UA
 Lubitsch Touch (*If I Had a Million, Design for Living, Trouble in Paradise, Love Parade, Monte Carlo, Smiling Lieutenant, One Hour With You*) Image Entertainment
 M (Voyager)
 Member of the Wedding Image Entertainment
 Men of the Fighting Lady MGM/UA
 Miracle on 34th Street (50th Anniversary Edition; in original black & white, with extras) Fox Video
 Mogambo MGM/UA

The New Deal Documentaries (*The Plow That Broke the Plains, The River, Power and the Land, The New Frontier*) Image Entertainment
 Noah's Ark (silent) MGM/UA
 Nothing Sacred Image Entertainment
 Of Human Bondage Roan Group
 Of Mice and Men Image Entertainment
 Origins of Film Image Entertainment
 The Outlaw / The Sin of Harold Diddlebock Roan Group
 Paths of Glory MGM/UA
 Perils of Pauline (Hutton) Roan Group
 A Personal Journey with Martin Scorsese Through American Movies (documentary) (Voyager 2 discs)
 Phantom Empire Roan Group
 Quicksand Roan Group
 Red House (Robinson) Roan Group
 Roy Rogers Collection (*My Pal Trigger, King of the Cowboys*) Roan Group
 Santa Fe Trail Roan Group
 Sleeping Beauty Disney
 Sunrise (with original 1927 Movietone music track and all new stereo score; 10 minutes of out-takes) 20th Century Fox Home Entertainment
 That Uncertain Feeling Roan Group
 Tol'able David Image Entertainment
 Tomorrow is Forever MGM/UA
 Tortilla Flat MGM/UA
 Tulsa Roan Group

DVD:

Abbott & Costello in the Foreign Legion Universal Home Video
 Adam's Rib MGM/UA
 An American in Paris MGM/UA
 Animal Crackers Universal Home Video
 Animation Legend: Winsor McCay Lumivision
 Bela Lugosi Collection: Devil Bat, Scared to Death Lumivision
 Belle of the Nineties Universal Home Video
 Best Years of Our Lives HBO Video
 Bishop's Wife HBO Video
 Boys' Town MGM/UA
 The Brave One Lumivision
 Brigadoon MGM/UA
 Cabinet of Dr. Caligari Image
 Casablanca MGM/UA
 Chaplin Mutuals Volumes 1, 2 and 3 (sold separately) Image
 Citizen Kane Warner
 Dark Victory MGM/UA
 Duck Soup Universal Home Video
 Felix! Lumivision
 Forbidden Planet MGM/UA
 From Here to Eternity Columbia
 Horse Feathers Universal Home Video
 I'm No Angel Universal Home Video
 In the Navy (Abbott & Costello) Universal Home Video
 Jezebel MGM/UA
 Landmarks of Early Film Image \$29.99
 Lost World (with extras, silent) Lumivision
 National Velvet MGM/UA
 Nosferatu (original silent) Image
 Nothing Sacred Lumivision
 Open City Image
 Phantom of the Opera Image
 Philadelphia Story MGM/UA
 Red River MGM/UA
 Royal Wedding UAV
 The Searchers (including TV promo) Warner
 Show Boat MGM/UA
 Singin' in the Rain MGM/UA
 Some Like it Hot MGM/UA
 Stagecoach Warner
 A Star is Born (Janet Gaynor) Image
 Strangers on a Train (two different cuts—101-minute Hollywood version and 103-minute version, plus trailers for *Train, Foreign Correspondent, I Confess, Dial M for Murder, Northwest* (original trailer, not reissue)) Warner
 That's Entertainment! MGM/UA
 Wizard of Oz MGM/UA
 Woman of the Year MGM/UA
 Wuthering Heights HBO Video
 Young Duke Series: The Fugitive (three colorized, stereoized and drastically edited John B-Westerns) UAV

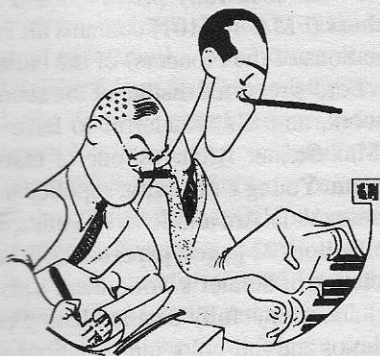
Stylish Tributes to Fred, George and Ira

Dancing onscreen, Fred Astaire was so incomprehensibly graceful that you couldn't believe what you were seeing. (Fred tried to convince you that his skills weren't an illusion by filming his numbers in long, uninterrupted takes.) Even during the stretches between the production numbers, he had a pervasive charm that made it a joy just to watch him. And as a singer, nobody ever accomplished more with less. Astaire had a light, not-too-powerful voice with a limited range. However, it was pure, musical, graceful, humorous and masculine—in other words, a perfect fit to Fred's visual image.

That voice, and the glorious MGM studio orchestra, provide a sumptuous musical banquet in the new 2-CD set **Fred Astaire at MGM** (TCM/Rhino R2 72828; \$29.98), 39 tracks and about 148 minutes of great numbers, among them several of the finest in film-musical history.

Not quite everything is here; "The Babbitt and the Bromide" from *Ziegfeld Follies* is a casualty, as are the purely instrumental accompaniments such as "Dancing in the Dark" from *The Band Wagon*. But the included selections, ranging from 1933 to 1957, are complete—sometimes more than complete, as with the extended versions of "You'd Be Hard to Replace" from *The Barkleys of Broadway* and "All of You" from *Silk Stockings*. Two numbers have been retrieved from the cutting-room floor: "If Swing Goes, I Go Too," left out of *Ziegfeld Follies*, and a *Band Wagon* outtake of "Got a Bran New Suit."

While you're savoring classics such as "A Couple of Swells" and "A Shine on Your Shoes," it's fun to reacquire yourself with numbers like "Oops!," "Yolanda" and "I Left My Hat in Haiti." The sound quality is generally superb, mostly taken from optical masters (sometimes from several simultaneously recorded, thus allowing true stereo mixes). Will Friedwald provides a typically perceptive and comprehensive essay to the well-illustrated booklet, which also includes full credits for the films and excerpted selections.



Fred figures prominently in another TCM/Rhino two-CD set, **George and Ira Gershwin in Hollywood** (R2 72732; \$29.98), singing on 12 tracks out of 40. This is an admirably full survey of Gershwin on film, using not only the MGM, Warner Bros. and RKO soundtracks owned by Turner, but material from Fox, Samuel Goldwyn and Paramount.

Seventeen films are represented, including the 1932 and 1943 versions of *Girl Crazy*, an Artie Shaw Vitaphone short, the classic RKO Astaire films, and Fox's *The Shocking Miss Pilgrim*, a 1947 Betty Grable musical with new lyrics by Ira added to George's previously unused compositions. Licensing problems prevented the use of some anticipated tracks, such as the Ira Gershwin-Harold Arlen songs for *A Star is Born*, or material from the Goldwyn *Porgy and Bess*, but what's here is, to quote the song title, Delicious.

It's saddening to think that only three of the 17 films were released during George's lifetime, but ultimately it's a tribute to the lasting popularity of his melodies and Ira's witty lyrics. The vocal cast is star-studded, with Astaire, Garland, Jolson, Gene Kelly, Dick Haymes and others; there's a wide variety of musical styles represented, from the swing of Shaw and Dorsey to the semi-classical "Third Prelude" played by Oscar Levant.

Some welcome rarities include Ella Logan's "I Was Doing All Right" and a Virginia Verrill-Jon Hall duet on "Love Walked In," both taken from one-of-a-kind acetates for *Goldwyn Follies*. The sound quality on these two tracks is slightly rough, but the others (including a wonderful, unused ten-minute medley for Warners' *Rhapsody in Blue*) sound fine.

The fully illustrated booklet, annotated by Gershwin expert Edward Jablonski, is wonderful except for a couple of surprising mistakes: the 1926 *Don Juan* was not a short film in which people "talked and played musical instruments" (it was a silent feature with a synchronized musical score); and it's Bert Wheeler, not Eddie Quillan, who sings "You've Got What Gets Me." Aside from these gaffes, this is a terrific, stylish tribute to two irreplaceable talents. (Both sets available in stores and from RhinoDirect: (800) 432-0020.)

Music, Mirth in Black Talkies

In 1929, film producer Al Christie (who'd been making comedy shorts since 1916) took advantage of the new sound technology in a novel way—by making two-reel comedies with all-black casts. Based on "Darktown Birmingham," a series of stories written by Octavus Roy Cohen and published in the *Saturday Evening Post* for over 15 years, these shorts starred members of the Lafayette Players Stock Company of Harlem, which was then appearing at a theatre in Los Angeles.

Four of these two-reelers—*Music Hath Harms*, *The Melancholy Dame*, *Framing of the Shrew* and *Oft in the Silly Night*—have recently been issued on video as **Birmingham Black Bottom** (Yazoo 702; \$19.95). The level of humor is, thankfully, better than those titles. Those who flee in politically-correct agony from *Amos 'n' Andy* had better stay away, since the snappy dialogue is filled with more dialect than Gosden and Correll used. The stories are populated by such colorful folk as Florian Slappy and Permanent Williams. If these characters are stereotypes, they're presumably ones that were acceptable to the black audiences for which these films were intended.

The performers are wonderful, including Edward Thompson, Roberta Hyson, Evelyn Preer and Spencer Williams, best remembered as Andy Brown on television but also a talented writer and director. Jazz fans will find a bonus in *Music Hath Harms*, which prominently features Curtis Mosby's Dixieland Blue Blowers. The prints appear to be quite good 16mm copies; sound and picture are generally fine. (Available from Shanachie Entertainment: (800) 497-1043)

If these films whet your appetite for more, you should definitely obtain **Blacks in Black and White, 2nd Edition** (Scarecrow Press; 749 pages, hardcover; \$89.50) a splendid reference book by Henry T. Sampson which includes an overview of films with all-black casts made between 1910 and 1950; histories of black film studios; synopses and credits for hundreds of films, including period reviews; and biographies of the performers and creative personnel who made these films. Many fine stills help illuminate this neglected aspect of film history. More books should be as thorough as this one, which belongs in the collection of anyone interested in vintage films. (Scarecrow Press, P.O. Box 191, Blue Ridge Summit PA 17214-0191; (800) 462-6420.)



Fields, Sans Myths

If ever a personality typified the old Hollywood maxim "Print the legend," it was W.C. Fields. He gloried in writing fanciful accounts of his past, which publicity scribes from the studios embellished further. After his death, a myopic book by Robert Lewis Taylor called *W.C. Fields: His Follies and Fortunes* perpetuated the myths and established new ones. In 1973, Ronald J. Fields, the comedian's grandson, published a trove of private letters and scripts as *W.C. Fields By Himself*, which revealed Fields as a complex and multilayered personality, one who sweated over the smallest nuances of his craft and who sustained many loving friendships.

Simon Louvish, who wrote a perceptive booklet about Fields' masterful film *It's a Gift* a few years ago, now brings us **Man on the Flying Trapeze: The Life and Times of W.C. Fields** (Norton; 564 pages, hardcover; \$29.95). It's written rather colloquially, as if Louvish—an unabashed Fields fan—is casually recounting the Great Man's story with you over drinks. However, it is superbly researched and liberally laced with excerpts from letters, articles, vaudeville sketches and filmed routines.

One might find its structure a bit lopsided at first, since a majority of the book concerns Fields on the stage. However, this is appropriate when one realizes that his theater career ran from 1898 through 1930; the film work by which we remember him was compressed into 1932-41. Louvish shows us the stage origins of routines which became known as classic bits of film. Comparisons of movie scripts with the filmed dialogue brings us new understanding of the care that Fields brought to his work.

Fields' complex off-screen personality is well-delineated; he was extremely well-read and (despite his drinking) meticulous, rarely allowing one aspect of his life to intrude on the others. I don't agree that Fields "felt, at his core, that he was not being funny enough" — there's evidence that he knew damn well he was talented — but Louvish has cut through the myths to reveal W.C. Fields as a man and artist even more fascinating than the character he created.

Scores Galore: *Casablanca*, *The Searchers* on CD; Steiner and Raksin in Print

You'd think that a classic film like *Casablanca* would've been represented by a soundtrack album for years. After all, that memorable Max Steiner score—featuring, of course, Herman Hupfeld's 1931 song "As Time Goes By"—should be a basic item for any soundtrack collector's library, right?

As it turns out, this classic score has never been fully obtainable, an oversight largely corrected by the release of **Casablanca: Original Motion Picture Soundtrack** (TCM/Rhino R2 72911; \$15.98). "Largely" because the available materials, or rather *unavailable* materials, prevent this from being a complete release of the uninterrupted score in the manner of other TCM/Rhino releases. The Warner Bros. soundtrack elements were not entirely preserved, so this disc has been cobbled together from the best possible sources. A few cues were in Max Steiner's collection of acetate discs, now stored at Brigham Young University, but a new search through the Warner Brothers archives located 20 minutes of the Steiner score, along with some alternate takes of Dooley Wilson's vocals. These have been edited with the final film soundtrack to give the fullest possible collection of original performances.

Much of the memorable dialogue has been retained, so this disc also functions as a digest version of the movie, running 64 minutes (only 38 minutes shorter than the film). Some supplemental material includes an unused Dooley Wilson song, "Dat's What N Done," and a complete "As Time Goes By" (the pianist actually playing in the film, it should be noted, is Elliot Carpenter). The sound quality is uniformly excellent despite the variety of sources, and the fully-illustrated booklet with notes by historian Rudy Behlmer helps add up to another superb entry in the TCM/Rhino series. (Available in stores and through RhinoDirect: (800) 432-0020.)

Fortunately, another great Max Steiner score has been fully preserved and is available in a special limited edition CD. **The Searchers** (FMA MS101) contains all the cues, as well as a longer, unused performance (by the Sons of the Pioneers) of the song heard over the opening credits. Despite director John Ford's reported dislike of the score, this is among Steiner's finest and most enduring work, and it's wonderful to have it available, complete, in terrific sound quality. The Max Steiner Archives, one of the notable collections at the Film Music Archives at Brigham Young University, supplied the acetate source material for the above CDs. Curator James V. D'Arc and John N. Gill have also produced a fine book, **The Max Steiner Collection** (92 pages, paperback). Late film scholar Tony Thomas has provided an appreciation of Steiner's work; there's also a chronology (focusing on his pre-Hollywood career) and a very fully detailed listing of everything in the Steiner archives. Wonderful, rare photos and full-color reproductions of sheet music covers make this a very special little book. (The book and the *Searchers* CD are available from Film Music Archives, Special Collections and Manuscripts, Harold Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo UT 84602; write for information.)

Happily now in print are **The Timeless Melodies of David Raksin** (Ekay Music, 112 pages, paperback; \$14.95), themes written by the talented film composer best known for "Laura." This book includes piano arrangements of 23 compositions (for films such as *The Bad and the Beautiful*, *Separate Tables* and *Suddenly*), each one prefaced by an enjoyable comment from the composer. There's also a concise survey of his career, and several vintage photos of Raksin at work. (Ekay Music, 223 Katonah Ave., Katonah NY 10536.)

If you love soundtracks, you should contact The Film Music Society, an organization which labors mightily to preserve the archives of film composers. For information on membership, contact The Film Music Society, P.O. Box 93536, Hollywood CA 90093-0536; (818) 248-5775; you can visit them on the Web at <http://www.oldkingcole.com/spfm/>

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Music

Early Jazz Restored on Timeless CD

We're pleased to note the arrival of two new CDs from the Timeless label, based in Holland. The firm's "Chris Barber Collection," executive-produced by the veteran British jazz trombonist, includes many rarities that have not been reissued before.

One of the label's most thrilling ventures into jazz archeology is **Ragtime to Jazz 2** (CBC 1-045), which contains 26 extremely rare discs from that hazy period of 1916 through 1922, when ragtime was fading and more roisterous forms of music were gaining favor. To give you an idea of the rarity of some of these tracks, there's "A Good Man is Hard to Find," recorded anonymously in 1919 for the Little Wonder label (5.5" records sold at ten for a dollar) by a group including famed clarinetist Wilbur Sweatman; he never knew this had been issued, only recalling decades later that the company had asked him to make a short "test" recording! An Edison waxing of "Dixieland One-Step" by a band co-led by pianist Vincent Lopez has never before been issued. Nor has an unknown band's "Muscle Shoals Blues," remarkable for being an electrical recording from 1921, four years before the process became standard.

The performances, by such luminaries as Ted Lewis, trumpeter Phil Napoleon, Eubie Blake (providing a wonderful piano solo from 1921), the Original Dixieland Jazz Band (in a rare Vocalion disc) and pianist Jimmy Durante (who plays on five sides with different bands from 1920-21), are often rather quaint. However, one can hear a new style of music being formed, however tentatively, which makes these records fascinating. The decades melt away in the vibrant transfers by John R.T. Davies. The booklet, with very detailed notes by Mark Beresford, excels also. (Available from Worlds Records, Tower Records; <http://www.worldsmusic.com/timeless>.)

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Ted Lewis, Old Hat? You Bet!

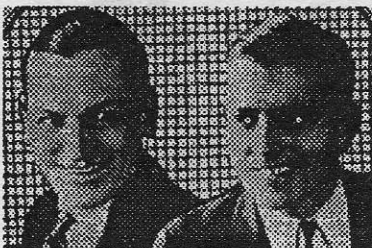
He was dismissed as "corny" in his day, and jazz record collectors still dismiss Ted Lewis with the same adjective today. Wearing a sad smile and a battered top hat, Lewis played a piercing, cackling clarinet that was hardly the stuff of great jazz. His vocals were not sung but recited in an overly dramatic, quivery singsong voice. Some of these refrains were so sentimental as to be almost maudlin, and others were exhortations to cheer up and smile, because a new day filled with sunshine was just around the corner.

Yes, he was corny—and that was the point. Ted Lewis took these unusual elements and turned them into spellbinding entertainment. He remained a star from the late Teens through the Sixties, so his combination of music, humor and sentimentality must've touched something inside a lot of people. Even though he couldn't play jazz, he appreciated men who could, and his Columbia records of the '20s and early '30s feature luminaries Benny Goodman, Muggsy Spanier, Fats Waller and Jimmy Dorsey.

Twenty of the finest examples of Lewis' brand of music have just been released on a new compact disc, **Ted Lewis: Is Everybody Happy Now?** (Take Two TT423; \$15.98) Spanning the peak period of 1926 through '33, the tracks include some favorites such as "When My Baby Smiles at Me," "Darktown Strutters' Ball" and "Egyptian Ella." Guest star Fats Waller gets the spotlight on "I'm Crazy 'Bout My Baby" and "Royal Garden Blues," proving not only Lewis' generosity but his ability to spot talent (Waller had only made one vocal record prior to these sides). Goodman (who took up clarinet in emulation of Lewis) and cornetist Spanier are on a number of sides, notably "Dip Your Brush in the Sunshine."

Among the titles that haven't been heard much in the last six decades are "San," "Home Made Sunshine," "I'm Sure of Everything But You," "Somebody Loves You" and "Old Playmate." Lewis collectors will certainly want this disc for these rarities, but even the well-known tracks are significantly upgraded in sound quality. *Is Everybody Happy?* Those of us who love Ted Lewis certainly are. (Available from Take Two Records, P.O. Box 36729, Los Angeles CA 90036; (213) 939-4419.)

The Compleat Coon-Sanders Due on CD



Messrs. Sanders and Coon

The Coon-Sanders Nighthawks are usually ignored or flippantly dismissed in the music history books as a Roaring '20s "doo-wacka-doo" outfit. The fact is that while the band certainly conveyed a spirit of fun, it was made up of top-caliber musicians. Pianist Joe Sanders was a superb arranger and no slouch as a composer, either—and drummer Carleton Coon kept the rhythm section moving. Both were fine singers, either solo or in harmony vocals.

The band made 75 issued recordings, and these along with several previously unissued rarities will ultimately be released in a four-volume series. **Coon-Sanders Volume 1** (The Old Masters MB 111; \$12.98) has the band's first 23 tracks. The first one chronologically—"Some Little Bird" from 1921, their only waxing until 1924—is frankly not a good performance, so it's been relegated to the end of the CD. All other titles (beginning with the joyous "Nighthawk Blues," a musical plug for the group's show over WDAF-Kansas City) are in order of recording.

The band seems to have found the hallmarks of its style fairly early, but the material it recorded is sometimes a little tepid. These tracks are offset by the hotter numbers, including gems such as "I'm Gonna Charleston Back to Charleston," "Yes, Sir! That's My Baby," "Everything is Hotsy-Totsy Now" and "Flamin' Mamie."

Eleven tracks were recorded acoustically; the sound quality improves dramatically with the changeover to the electrical system in 1925. All sides are preserved here in fine transfers, far superior to any previous reissues, by George Morrow and England's audio wizard John R.T. Davies. We can hardly wait for Volume Two, which promises an unbroken string of Coon-Sanders classics. (Available from The Old Masters, P.O. Box 25358, San Mateo CA 94402.)



Stomp Off Presents '20s-Style Bands In the '90s

The hot music of the 1920s and early '30s isn't entirely a thing of the past, thanks to a dedicated band of, uh, bands. And also thanks to Bob Erdos,

who for many years has been doing a superb job of seeing that the best current bands playing vintage music are being properly recorded. His label, Stomp Off Records, has long been a source of traditional jazz music played by fine revival bands; more recently, Erdos has been expanding into the area of hot dance-band music.

San Francisco Starlight Orchestra: Cheerful Little Earful (Stomp Off CD1296) is a fine CD by a superb group, begun in 1985, which delights faithful fans in Mill Valley, California. (For information about the band's monthly concerts, call the Orchestra's business manager, Jim Brennan, at (707) 973-6107.) The spirit of Bix Beiderbecke pervades the proceedings in recreations of "Because My Baby Don't Mean Maybe Now," "Clementine," "There Ain't No Sweet Man That's Worth the Salt of My Tears," "Proud of a Baby Like You," "Reaching For Someone," and "Bessie Couldn't Help It." Other titles include such period favorites as "Where the Shy Little Violets Grow" and "I'm Young and Healthy."

If you enjoy the hotter records by George Olsen, Ben Selvin, Ben Pollack and Paul Whiteman, this CD gives you a real sense of what those bands sounded like in the flesh. Arrangements for many of the selections have been transcribed directly from original records, others have been written by pianist/arranger Alan Hall—but all have the authentic sound. (Sometimes, the SFSO'ers make variations that are improvements on the originals!) Sixteen members strong, the whole band is a delight, playing with obvious reverence for the original arrangements—but not so much that the performances don't cook. All 22 tracks are beautifully recorded and performed. (You may want to visit the SFSO's website at <http://www.johnhoward.com/sfso.htm>)

Between 1925 and '30, a batch of fine recordings were released under the imprint of The Charleston Chasers—nothing more than a studio group, but one which at various times included Red Nichols, Miff Mole, Pee Wee Russell, the Dorsey Brothers and a host of other fine jazzmen. The group name has been assumed by a group of British early-jazz enthusiasts. They emulate their musical forebears in that the personnel changes quite a bit from disc to disc, but the quality remains excellent. **The Charleston Chasers: Pleasure Mad** (CD1287) also recreates some late '20s classics ("Clementine" again) along with more commercial tunes ("That's You, Baby," "The Man From the South"). This band sometimes enjoys grittier fare such as "Shake It and Break It," "Hop Head" and "The Nightmare." **Steaming South** (CD1314) is a very full disc (80:06!) of '20s gems, such as "Stomp Off, Let's Go" (a good recreation of the classic Erskine Tate version), "I Love My Baby" (Waring's Pennsylvanians) and "My Pretty Girl" (Jean Goldkette). The performances are splendid; you'd almost think these were the original bands except for the English accent of vocalists Raina Reid and Nik Payton.

That's not a problem for the Swedish '20s band Kustbandet, which has employed American singer Carol Leigh to handle the vocal refrains. Any thoughts about Scandinavians being a cold, unemotional lot can be dismissed here and now, because in **On Revival Day** (CD1294) they play some very hot versions of "That Rhythm Man," Duke Ellington's "Freeze and Melt," and the Jean Goldkette "Hoosier Sweetheart." Trumpeter Bent Persson is superb, but the whole band really swings, among them bassist Göran Lind and tenor man John Högman. Kustbandet has so many fine soloists that the original '20s charts have to be expanded to accommodate them all (tracks often run longer than four minutes). Great arrangements, superb performances, beautiful recording quality and memorable songs add up to a terrific package. (Information: Stomp Off Records, P.O. Box 342, York PA 17405; (717) 854-9265.)



The Real Sat

The life of L. Armstrong was so colorful and so im- able that it almost *Forrest Gump* to sh From a dirt-poor b ning in the toughes of New Orle Armstrong found hi

vation in music, learning cornet as a Under the tutelage of King Joe Oliver, began revolutionizing jazz. In 1925 he gan making the "Hot Five" records for C and musicians worldwide began strugg to emulate his amazing technique, th ending flood of brilliant ideas. Ten later, he was an international star, appe regularly in films and finding a large adoring audience that transcended all co

He kept working steadily—might say obsessively—through the '50s and '60s, doing concerts, TV sh movies and recordings. He consorted royalty and joshed with the Pope, but contentedly in middle-class Corona, York, where he loved watching TV buying ice cream for the neighborhood

And all of that's just the begin Armstrong's life is almost too much into one book, but Laurence Bergreen ceeds splendidly in **Louis Armstrong Extravagant Life** (Broadway Books pages, hardcover; \$30.00). He covers the foregoing in fine detail, but also d into aspects of Armstrong's life and pe ality previously given little attention. New Orleans of Louis's youth comes in all its joy and terror. Armstrong's lif passion for marijuana is colorfully reco so are his marital problems (happil solved with his lasting fourth marriage occasional scuffles with gangsters an scrupulous managers.

Armstrong was a prolific and writer, and his letters and memoirs are quoted. Bergreen occasionally makes minor lapses (the date of Louis's jo Fletcher Henderson is cited as "the e October 1924," but he was already re ing with Henderson on October 7), but often he offers solid proof to correct held assumptions (Armstrong was pl cornet before entering the Colored V Home, for example). Mr. Bergreen's gent research, original thinking and lucid writing make this an Armstrong raphy unlikely to be surpassed.



Farewell to the Street Singer

We were saddened to hear of the death on October 5 of Arthur Tracy, known as "The Street Singer" on radio programs and recordings in the '30s and '40s. Mr. Tracy was 98 and had been living in Manhattan. Your editor had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Tracy in August 1991. At 92, he was still proud of his singing ability and was just as sentimental as his hit songs (such as "Marta, Rambling Rose of the Wildwood"), breaking into tears while telling a story about his first voice instructor. He had made his radio debut in 1931 when William Paley gave him a 15-minute daily CBS show, and still had fond memories of other performers coming to prominence via CBS at that time—the Mills Brothers, the Boswell Sisters, Kate Smith and Bing Crosby.

When his dramatic, haunting 1937 recording of "Pennies From Heaven" was used in the 1980 Steve Martin film of that name, there was a revival of interest in Arthur Tracy, and he began performing at venues such as the Cookery in Greenwich Village. He appeared in a touring company with the play "Social Security," and was in the 1988 film *Crossing Delancey*. Last year, he was given the Ellis Island Medal of Honor, reflecting the fact that he'd been born as Abba Tracovutsky in Moldavia and had emigrated to the States with his family in 1906. His autobiography, *The Street Singer*, is scheduled to be published this year by Harold, Martin & Redman.

Thankfully, Arthur's robust voice is preserved on several CDs currently available: **The Street Singer** (ASV/Living Era 5095; \$15.98) has "Marta" and 21 other classic tracks made between 1931 and '39. **Speak To Me of Love** (Memoir 517; \$15.98) covers the same time frame in 24 songs, including "East of the Sun" and Arthur's personal favorite of all his performances, "Smoke Gets In Your Eyes." **I Bring a Song** (Halcyon HDL 113; \$10.98) has 18 sides made between 1932 and '36. You might also check the used LP shops for an Audio Fidelity release from the early '60s (*Arthur Tracy - The Street Singer*, AFLP 1929) which has the old favorites in updated arrangements. Arthur's voice has lost a bit of its bass, but it's still powerful.

Mr. Tracy was one of this century's great romantics, and now that he's strolled into the sunset with a song in his heart, we'll remember him as he signed autographs for fans— "Always in song."



Glorious Rarities By Ruth Etting

It's no secret that Ruth Etting is one of the favorite artists of Jim Bedomian, the genial gent who runs Take Two Records. In the LP era, he released three fine Etting albums; one of his first CD issues was the fine *Ruth Etting: Goodnight My Love* (TT403), with twenty fine tracks from 1930-36.

Now, there's another excellent Etting release, **Ruth Etting: Glorifier of American Song** (TT422; \$15.98), which has twenty more sides—only four of which have appeared on the label's earlier releases. It's an indication of the quality and quantity of Ruth's recorded output that there's no sense of this disc being a "bottom of the barrel" collection. Even if only a few of the songs have become lasting standards ("All of Me," "I'll Never Have to Dream Again") the others will be old friends to fans of early '30s recordings.

Ruth felt that she was best suited to midtempo ballads, so even songs that are usually given an uptempo treatment have a slower pace here (among them "Me!" and "Without That Gal"—here reworked as "Without That Man"). "Whose Honey Are You?," taken from a transcribed 1935 broadcast, is a welcome rarity, as are two selections from a 1936 session done in England for the Rex label. Despite the scarcity of these sides, they sound absolutely great, far better than any Rex 78s we've ever encountered. Also having suprisingly fine sound are two tracks from Ruth's final sessions for Decca.

The real rarities, though are two tracks from 1958—twenty-one years after her official retirement and eleven years after a brief comeback. "There'll Be Some Changes Made" (issued only on a scarce promo 45) and "After You've Gone" (never issued before at all) have excellent, freewheeling hot jazz accompaniments, and Ruth is in fine voice. Her spunky vocals reveal that she could have easily handled hot material. She may have done these sides "strictly for laughs," but there's no fooling about the quality of these sides. (Take Two Records, P.O. Box 36729, Los Angeles CA 90036; (213) 939-4419.)



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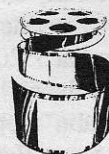
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'30s and '40s Sounds in '50s Hi-Fi

In the late 1950s, record buyers were seemingly obsessed with "High-Fidelity." The extended frequency range offered by new recording technology could give the listener a more lifelike reproduction of sound than previously possible. Many of the top performers who had made their first hit records in the '30s and '40s rushed to make new hi-fi recreations. Some labels which specialized in this kind of fare were Tops, Design and Pickwick; ironically, the excellent recording quality was often compromised (if not obliterated) by the cheap, hissy vinyl used for the LP pressings.

Now that we're in the CD era, it's possible to hear those high-fidelity recordings in all their glory. Simitar Entertainment has recently acquired and released many of these '50s packages, and the sound is quite a revelation. Even though these recordings were made in 1957 and '58, they should be of interest to vintage music fans.

Ray Eberle Plays Glenn Miller Favorites (Simitar 55242), a 12 track collection running 39:49, has Miller's old vocalist leading his own band through a dozen of Glenn's hits. Five selections are instrumentals, among them "In the Mood," "A String of Pearls," and "Sunrise Serenade." Eberle is in good form on "Fools Rush In," "Blue Champagne," "Skylark" and others, although his voice has become darker and deeper with the passage of fifteen years. The arrangements, played by old pros such as Will Bradley and Hymie Schertzer, exhibit the trademark Miller sound, although there are occasional variations (more trumpet solos on "Tuxedo Junction," for example).

Another Miller alumnus, arranger Jerry Gray, leads another group of big-band veterans (including Miller's clarinet lead, Willie Schwartz and trumpeters Zeke Zarchy and Johnny Best—not to mention a lot of Les Brown's best men) in **A Salute to Glenn Miller** (Simitar 55252). The twelve tracks, made in February 1958, are in gorgeous stereo and have that authentic feel—all save "Johnson Rag," which for some reason is presented in a '50s rock 'n' roll-style chart, honking sax courtesy of Dave Harris. Remarkably none of the tunes ("Sun Valley Jump," "Elmer's Tune," "Pennsylvania 6-5000") duplicate those on the Eberle tribute. Gray puts a new spin on an old favorite with "Restraining the Pearls."

Dance-band sounds of an earlier vintage are saluted in **Hits of the Flirty '30s** (Pickwick 11652), nine tracks by Lew Raymond and his Orchestra. The arrangements sometimes recall Hal Kemp ("Got a Date With an Angel," "Did You Ever See a Dream Walking") or Shep Fields (whose "Rippling Rhythm" sound is used on "Three Little Fishies," a hit for Kay Kyser), but mostly they're in a general late '30s swing-era style. The musicians and vocalists (including an Andrewsish trio called the Willow Sisters) are uniformly excellent, as is the stereo sound.

One piano giant pays tribute to another on **André Previn: Fats Waller Song Book** (Simitar 55202). The stereo disc features eight Waller compositions—the obligatory "Ain't Misbehavin'" and "Honeysuckle Rose" are nicely balanced with lesser-known gems such as "Stealin' Apples" and the downright obscure "Oh, You Sweet Thing" and "That's Where the South Begins." There's also one Previn original, "Fatstuff." Stylistically, these bass-piano-drums tracks are more modern jazz than stride-style, but the Waller influence is unmistakable, as is the phenomenal talent of Previn, only 26 when these were made.

A singer who began recording in 1926 and continued having hits through the '60s is heard here in 1957 stereo on **Kate Smith: God Bless America** (Pickwick 11552), which includes that signature song and nine others about various states ("Moonlight in Vermont," "Beautiful Ohio," "Oklahoma!"). Kate is in splendid voice, the arrangements are inventive, and the large orchestra supporting her is superb. You'll be surprised at the musical heat generated by Kate and the band on "Deep in the Heart of Texas," and "My Old Kentucky Home" is a pretty swinging chart, too.

The packaging on all of these releases is excellent, with full liner notes by a number of pop-music scholars. Dave Pell, former Les Brown sideman and producer of some of these collections, is quoted at length in many of the essays. These were, and remain, budget-priced releases (the CDs usually retail for \$8.00 or less), but there's no scrimping on the quality. Simitar promises future releases by Connee Boswell and other luminaries (we're hoping for reissues of the Tops albums by the Hoosier Hot Shots and Beatrice Kay); stay tuned. (For further information: Simitar Entertainment, 3850 Annapolis Lane N., Suite 140, Minneapolis MN 55447-5443; <http://www.simitar.com>.)



A Carousel of Vintage Christmas Cheer

For a delightfully different variation on the classic yuletide melodies, you should hear two new collections from Marion Roehl Recordings, a label devoted to band organs, orchestrions, nickelodeons and other mechanical music machines.

Christmas Carousel Music Vol. 1 (MRR 1024) has 20 selections, all in very creative arrangements by Netherlands native Tom Meijer. They're particularly impressive since the Wurlitzer organ used here (a Model 146A, built in the late 1920s) has only three bass notes. The tunes range from the whimsy of "Toyland" to more sanctimonious fare such as "O Holy Night," "Joy to the World" and "Ode to Joy"—all of which work surprisingly well with this unorthodox instrumentation.

The Wurlizer band organ is the same for **Christmas Carousel Music Vol. 2** (MRR 1026), but the arranger is different. Wayne Holton is now only 25 and self-taught as a pianist and arranger—but what a talent. He's somehow able to mark the holes and slots for the rolls without having to use a written score. In any event, his talent comes through in all of this collection's 28 tracks. We were particularly fond of the inventive "Here Comes Santa Claus," a jaunty rendition of "I'll Be Home for Christmas" and a lovely version of "Ave Maria"—a tune you wouldn't expect to hear on a carousel organ, but a beautiful and respectful arrangement nonetheless.

The 1920s vintage band organ has been completely refurbished and is beautifully in tune here; the quality of the recording is also impressive, capturing the band organ's every tinkling bell, crashing cymbal and mighty drum roll with full fidelity.

Both albums are available either as CDs (for \$15.98 each) or as cassette tapes from Marion Roehl Recordings, 3533 Stratford Drive, Vestal NY 13850; (607) 797-9062.

Keyboard Kapers on New CDs

Back in PT 26, we reviewed a wonderful CD of 1920s-vintage music newly recorded on a 1914 Wurlitzer Model CX orchestrion. Well, the sequel is here, and it's just as much fun as the original. **Roadhouse Razzmatazz Vol. 2** (MRR 1042; \$15.98) has such favorites as "Chinatown, My Chinatown," "After You've Gone" and "Dardanella"—as well as tunes you may never have heard, such as "Hunky Dory," "Miserable Rag" and "Razz Berries." The instrumentation is just as colorful as the repertoire. The player piano is accompanied by 38 violin pipes, 38 flute pipes, bass and snare drums, a cymbal, orchestra bells and a mandolin attachment. There's a lot of variety packed into the 53:51 and 28 tracks of this collection—jazzy tunes, vaudeville songs, rags, marches, one- and two-steps and even a few blues numbers. If you can't afford one of these vintage music machines, at least you can hear its charming sounds in superlative, you-are-there sound quality for only the cost of a CD. (Available from Marion Roehl Recordings, 3533 Stratford Drive, Vestal, NY 13850; (607) 797-9062.)

Lest we forget that vintage songs are also fun when played the old-fashioned human way, there's a fine series of CDs and cassettes by Virginia City, Nevada-based pianist Squeek Steele, collectively called **The Good Old Songs**. Most of the songs on the six volumes range from the 1890s up to 1930, but there are a few '40s standards in the repertoire. Volume One, *From Ragtime to Wartime*, has 26 familiar numbers, among them "It Had to Be You," "Bye Bye Blackbird," "Puttin' on the Ritz," and "Margie." The ragtime enthusiast will enjoy Ms. Steele's renditions of "Scott Joplin's New Rag," "Easy Winners," "Gladiolus Rag," and the ever-popular "Maple Leaf Rag." All are played with just the right mixture of respect and enthusiasm. While the packaging states that the tracks are "recorded live on the honky-tonk and antique pianos of the old mining town of Virginia City," the pianos are nicely in tune, the recording quality is excellent and the performances are wonderful. The six volumes are available as CDs for \$15.98 each or audiocassettes for \$10.98 (with discounts for quantity orders) from Saddle Butte Music, P.O. Box 632, Virginia City NV 89440; (702) 847-9511. You can also visit Ms. Steele's website at <http://www.goodoldsongs.com>.

Celebrating Red Ingle: For Seventy Mental Reasons

by Jordan R. Young



Ernest "Red" Ingle excelled at many things: he was an accomplished saxophonist, clarinet player, violinist, singer, aviator, cartoonist and saddle-maker. He was first and foremost a brilliant comedian, as evidenced by the recordings he made with Spike Jones and his City Slickers as well as his own band.

Early in his career Ingle (1906-1965) worked with Jean Goldkette's Greystone Orchestra (alongside Bix Beiderbecke) and Ted Weems, and played comedy bits on such radio shows as *The Jack Benny Program* and *Fibber McGee and Molly*. After helping to propel Spike Jones to new heights in the mid '40s with hugely popular parodies of

"Chloe" and "Glow Worm," as well as many of the gags and vocal effects heard on the Slickers' records--and failing to reap his just rewards--Ingle left to pursue other interests.

The comic was touring in an English translation of "Die Fledermaus" in 1947 when there was a sudden unexpected change in his fortunes: a hillbilly parody record he had made for Capitol caught fire and became a national hit. "Tim-Tayshun" ("Temptation") didn't do much for the career of the female vocalist, Cinderella G. Stump (alias Jo Stafford), but it sold roughly three million copies and made Ingle and his Natural Seven a much-in-demand commodity. The only trouble was, Ingle didn't have a real band at the time; it was as much of a lark as anything else.

The members of the Natural Seven varied from one recording to the next and included several former City Slickers among their ranks. The key men were arranger Joseph "Country" Washburne—who first worked with Ingle in the Weems orchestra and closely collaborated with him during their tenure together in Jones' band, notably on "Chloe"—and lyricist Foster Carling, who also wrote special material for Jones.

Red Ingle: Tim-Tayshun (Bear Family BCD 16 115 AH) pays homage to the work of this multi-talented, unjustly neglected comedian, collecting all 21 of his Capitol selections. The compilation, which runs a generous 79 minutes, also includes six previously unreleased tracks plus another issued only on an Australian LP. (One remaining unissued Capitol track, "Throw Him Out," had to be eliminated for lack of space).

It is difficult to fault compilation producers Dave Samuelson and Richard Weize, who have done a superb job, but I disagree with them on one key point. Red's raucous recordings, delightful as they are, sound too much alike—to my ear, at any rate—to listen to in succession. It's easy to overload, like trying to watch a video collection of Tex Avery cartoons all at once. Both are more fully appreciated in small doses.

There are some real winners on this disc. Among my personal favorites are "Them Durn Fool Things" (which partners Ingle with June Foray) and "'A' You're a Dopey Gal" (featuring regular vocalist Karen Tedder). Others that stir fond memories are "Cigareetes, Whuskey and Wild Wild Women" (Ingle's second chart success), "For Seventy Mental Reasons" and "Serutan Yob" (a spoof of "Nature Boy" made during the record ban, featuring the Unnatural Seven sans Red -- namely Tedder and madcap disc jockey Jim Hawthorne).

Those who recall the Jones-Ingle send-up of "Liebestraum" will rejoice to the strains of "Moe Zart's Turkey Trot" and "Pagan Nanny's Keep 'Er Goin' Stomp." The latter is evidence of Ingle's considerable skill as a violinist (as a child he was occasionally "tutored" by family friend Fritz Kreisler).

Among the issued tracks, three of the later ones are obscure delights: "Pool," a beer tavern ditty; "People Are Funny," which is more amusing than the similarly-titled Jones record; and "Chew Tobacco Rag," a collaboration between Ingle and Stuyvesant Skonch (alias Les Paul, who produced the session in his garage studio).

The previously unreleased tracks include "Cigardust" (a takeoff on "Stardust" for which Hoagy Carmichael's publisher refused permission), "I Surrender Dear" and "Run Little Eva" (highlighted by steel guitar virtuosos Speedy West and Jimmy Bryant, themselves the subjects of a recent Bear Family compilation). The CD, which features clean, crisp transfers, includes a detailed biography and discography, along with many rare illustrations. (Available from Collectors' Choice Music, (800) 923-1122.)

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ART TATUM: California Melodies The amazing pianist is heard here in 24 rare tracks from a 1940 Los Angeles radio show. Some are Tatum favorites (*Elegie*, *Tea For Two*), others are rarities (*I Cried For You*, *I Thought About You*, *This Can't Be Love*). All are superior recordings.
MA7007.....\$11.98

FROM TAKE TWO RECORDS:

PHIL HARRIS: ECHOES FROM THE COCOANUT 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*.
TT416CD.....\$12.98

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 startorches 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*.
TT415CD.....\$12.98

THE FIRST TORCH SINGERS: Volume One, The Twenties Fanny Brice, Helen Morgan, Ruth Etting, Libby Holman, Sophie Tucker, Belle Baker, Lee Morse, Kate Smith, Annette Hanshaw, Frances Williams and Eva Taylor carry the torch on 20 great selections, including *More Than You Know*, *The Man I Love* and *Then You've Never Been Blue*.
TT 407.....\$12.98

THE FIRST TORCH SINGERS: Volume Two, 1930-34 The "golden age" of torch songs revisited, with Ruth Etting, Helen Morgan, Libby Holman, Marion Harris, Ethel Waters, Kate Smith, Adelaide Hall, Lee Morse, Frances Langford, Mildred Bailey and others. Songs: *Love For Sale*, *Stormy Weather*, *My Old Flame*, more.
TT 412.....\$12.98

THE FIRST CROONERS: Volume One, The Twenties First in a series to highlight the development of crooning. Features 20 early crooners: Bing Crosby, Dick Powell, Gene Austin, Jack Smith, Rudy Vallee, etc. *Sentimental Baby*, *Broadway Melody*, more.
TT 411.....\$12.98

GUS ARNHEIM: Echoes From the Coconut Grove (1931) Arnheim's full-toned (and often pretty hot!) orchestra from transcribed radio shows. Vocals by Bing Crosby (first known broadcast), Loyce Whiteman, Donald Novis, Harry Barris and others. Songs: *Sweet Georgia Brown*, *Out of Nowhere*, more.
TT 410.....\$12.98

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.
TT 406.....\$12.98

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.
TT 403.....\$12.98

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.
TT 402.....\$12.98

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

SUNBEAM/OJL RECORDS:

BIX BEIDERBECKE: Bix Restored (1924-1929) 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 the versions of *In My Merry Oldsmobile*. Also includes Bix's first and best tracks with the Frank Trumbauer band—*Singin' the Blues*, *I'm Comin' Virginia*, more. The transfers by John R.T. Davies are superb!
BXCD 1-3 (3 CD Set).....\$44.98

DIAMOND CUT PRODUCTIONS:

UNRELEASED EDISON LATERALS 1 This is a 21-track anthology of hot and happy dance-band music, electrically recorded by Edison in 1928 and '29 and unreleased until now! Your feet will tap when you hear The California Ramblers' *Cause I Feel Low Down*, Winegar's Pennsylvania Boys' *My Gal Sal*, more.
DCP201D.....\$15.98

THE CALIFORNIA RAMBLERS: Edison Laterals 2 One of the best hot dance bands of the '20s romped through 20 tracks from 1928 and '29. Despite the extreme rarity, these tracks have excellent sound quality. Songs include *You're the Cream in My Coffee*, *Button Up Your Overcoat*, *Tiptoe Through the Tulips*, *Ain't Misbehavin'*, more.
DCP301D.....\$15.98

THE OLD MASTERS:

MILDRED BAILEY: Volume Two, Band Vocals (1931-34) 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 BROWNS: IES 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—the 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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All Ears For Banjo Eyes

Eddie Cantor was one of the first multimedia stars. Starting in vaudeville and progressing to the Broadway stage, Cantor soon began making recordings, writing books, and starring in movies. However, as Herbert G. Goldman correctly notes in **Banjo Eyes: Eddie Cantor and the Birth of Modern Stardom** (Oxford; 416 pages, hardcover; \$35.00), radio brought him his largest and most devoted audience. His weekly visits over the air turned him from a New York comedian into a family friend.

All aspects of Cantor's career are thoroughly documented—from his stage debut with "Frank B. Carr's Indian Maidens" in 1908 to his 1963 memoir *As I Remember Them*—but the radio work gets the most coverage. Cantor made his debut on the air in 1922 over WDY, making a great impression as guest on the *Rudy Vallee Fleischmann Hour* in February 1931. He began his first series for Chase and Sanborn in September of that year, and maintained a presence on radio through 1962.

Despite a probable affair in the '40s with comedienne Joan Davis, Cantor was a very devoted family man, who made his own wife and kids—"Ida and the five daughters"—well-known to his listeners, something which entertainers simply hadn't done before. His radio audience had tremendous empathy for him, which gave him a platform as a tireless campaigner for worthy causes. Unlike many showfolk, Eddie was always interested in public affairs, whether local or international. Goldman details Eddie's creation of the March of Dimes as well as the bold political statements he made against the anti-Semitic commentator Father Coughlin (which cost him his radio series in 1939).

Goldman, as shown in previous biographies of Al Jolson and Fanny Brice, does his homework, not only recreating the life of Cantor but the many worlds in which he lived. The book is not a puff piece: Cantor could be tough, and his material could be weak, flaws both duly noted. But ultimately he comes over as admirable: "Despite his ego and his frequently manipulative, street kid's cynicism, Eddie believed in his causes." A 78-page listing of Eddie's works is a real bonus. (Available in bookstores.)

Eddie and Jolie's Radio Romps Revisited



Two show business giants combine their talents on the excellent new 3-CD set **Cantor Meets Jolson** (Original Cast OC-9753), which collects all six of Jolie's appearances on Eddie's radio shows. A special treat is the first show, an episode of *Texaco Town* from January 3, 1937; it's the earliest known Cantor broadcast in circulation (even though Eddie began his series in 1931), and is presented in very good quality here. Jolson's contribution is only about six minutes, but it includes a terrific duet on the old standard "Dinah." Deanna Durbin sings "Kiss Me Again," Cantor spends much time looking for a trained flea named Oscar, and

the cast does a burlesque of "Uncle Tom's Cabin" where the only dialect in evidence is that of Parkyakarkus. Announcer Jimmy Wallington and second banana Sidney Fields also contribute to the fun.

Jolson's career was in the doldrums when he made his second guest appearance with Cantor, on the June 4, 1941 episode of *Time to Smile*. However, the audience loves him. Jolson is prominently featured through the entire half-hour, the spotlight shifting only for Dinah Shore's song ("Walkin' By the River"), a brief exchange with the Mad Russian—and a couple of commercials from Harry Von Zell. There's more comedy than music on this show as the pair reminisce about their long association; the jokes are a good deal better than on most of Jolson's own shows (the *Kraft* programs of 1948-49, for example). The sound quality is breathtaking, with full fidelity; surface noise is virtually nonexistent.

The audio has a smidgeon less quality on the *Pabst Blue Ribbon* show from March 6, 1947 (it's taken from a dub which has only recently been unearthed). It's still very listenable, and lots of fun—particularly when Cantor imitates Jolson's version of "California, Here I Come" and Al returns the favor on "If You Knew Susie."

The three remaining shows are likewise *Pabst* shows from 1948 and '49, when Jolson was again riding high thanks to the success of Columbia's biopic *The Jolson Story*. The show from January 8, 1948 has Eddie wondering who's going to play him in his own biographical movie (Keefe Braselle isn't nominated, but Boris Karloff is) and soliciting Jolson's advice. There are gags galore about Jolson's having "gone Hollywood," and about his advanced age: when Jolson notes that "life begins at 40," Eddie retorts, "Yeah, but this is the third time you've started!"

Michael Redgrave and Billie Burke are the primary guest stars on the June 8, 1948 show, with Jolson contributing only about three and one-half minutes (but getting the top guest-star billing!). He gives Eddie heartfelt congratulations on the 34th anniversary of his wedding to Ida, and sings, natch, "The Anniversary Song." Jolson is much more in evidence on the January 7, 1949 episode, which also brings back Dinah Shore for "Down Among the Sheltering Palms." Eddie and Al duet on "Mandy," and Jolson has a great bit where he complains about the tired gags he gets from Eddie's writers (too bad he didn't complain more to the *Kraft Music Hall* scribes!). There's also a *Pabst* beer commercial to the tune of "April Showers," which Jolson seems to enjoy.

But then again, this is a most enjoyable package, thanks to producer Brian Gari (Eddie's grandson) and audio engineer Seth Winner. The shows are still very funny, Cantor and Jolson are in fine voice, the sound quality is exceptional, the packaging is fully annotated—and the price is right, too. If you order the set from the Eddie Cantor Appreciation Society, the cost is only \$25.00 for the three-CD set, or \$15.00 for three cassettes—a bargain for three solidly entertaining hours of vintage radio. (Available from the Eddie Cantor Appreciation Society, Box 312, Mt. Gay WV 25637.)



Radio's Christmas Gift

A radio landmark is celebrating its 60th anniversary. In all the years since its initial 1937 broadcast, there's been nothing on the air quite like **The Cinnamon Bear**, a 26-chapter fantasy series that's now available in its entirety from Radio Spirits. The syndicated series was usually broadcast from just before Thanksgiving to just before Christmas, and it still makes fine listening during the holiday season.

The serial describes the adventures of twins Judy and Jimmy Barton, whose mother has asked them to go into the attic and find the silver star for the top of the family's Christmas tree. In the attic, they find that the star has been stolen—and they also find a four-inch tall stuffed teddy bear that has magically come to life. Paddy O'Cinnamon, the bear in question, tells Judy and Jimmy that the silver star has been purloined by the Crazy Quilt Dragon, who's taken it to his home in Maybeland. So, the search begins, taking the trio through the Looking Glass Valley, across the Root Beer Ocean, and into the Goody Goody Grove, among other picturesque locales.

The characters they encounter on their journey are likewise colorful, and they're portrayed by top Los Angeles-area radio actors who would be better known to the whole country in a few years: Gale Gordon doubles as Weary Willie the Stork and Oliver the Ostrich; Frank Nelson portrays Captain Tintop; Howard McNear is a cowboy and Elliott Lewis a magician; Elvia Allman is Penelope the Pelican, while Slim Pickens (!) is Samuel the Seal. Buddy Duncan plays Paddy, with Barbara Jean Wong as Judy Barton (the young actor playing Jimmy is unknown, sadly). The Crazy Quilt Dragon is the majestic Joseph Kearns. All of them seem to be getting quite a kick from their fantastic roles.

The scripts by Glenn Heisch and the music by Felix Mills with the Paul Taylor Quartet are as fanciful and enjoyable as the actors' performances.

Radio Spirits' release (available as #4036, five cassettes for \$24.98, or #4037, five CDs for \$34.98) is complete and uncut. The digitally remastered sound is very impressive, and so is the packaging—which provides a synopsis of each episode, along with a brief history of the series and credits for the performers. (Available from Radio Spirits, P.O. Box 2141, Schiller Park IL 60176; (800) RADIO-48.)

Sherlock Holmes on American Radio, Part 1

by Lawrence Nepodahl

With the approval of the Sir Arthur Conan Doyle estate, the famous detective's radio debut took place on Monday night, October 20, 1930, at 10:00 PM New York time on station WEAf-NBC. The half hour production was *The Adventure of the Speckled Band* and starred the great thespian/playwright William Gillette, had been playing Holmes on stage since 1899.

This project was launched by an equally fine writer and actress of prominence, Edith Meiser. She adapted the story and set out with her husband, Tom McKnight, to find a sponsor for this ambitious undertaking. They finally came into contact with the G. Washington Coffee Company, whose president was a devout fan of Sherlock Holmes. He easily agreed to have his firm sponsor a half-hour series.

The suggestion was then made to have Gillette appear before the microphone; he was considered the definitive representation of Holmes. Although there were some doubts that he could give the proper vitality to the role (Gillette was then 75), all went well, and he portrayed the sleuth as only he could. The role of Holmes' able associate, Dr. John H. Watson, was enacted by the British-born Leigh Lovell, who had been on the New York stage since 1918. Oddly enough, the announcer for the program was a Joseph Bell. Some may recall that one of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's instructors at medical school, the prototype for Sherlock Holmes, was Dr. Joseph Bell. The program was an instant hit.

Edith Meiser had thirty-four half hour adapted scripts all ready for broadcast in the fall of 1930. G. Washington Coffee was still backing the series, but now needed a new Holmes, since after the initial broadcast Gillette had returned to touring on stage. The role went to Richard Gordon, an American actor, perhaps because he sounded like (or mimicked) William Gillette. Leigh Lovell and Joseph Bell remained. In the show's format, which became standard throughout its long run, the announcer would pay a weekly visit to Dr. Watson at his home and coax him into recounting another of his adventures with Holmes.

Gordon, Lovell and Bell performed from October 27, 1930 until May 31, 1933 (excepting the standard three-month summer breaks). During these four seasons, the show changed networks (sometimes on NBC Red, sometimes on NBC Blue), timeslots (from 9 p.m. to 9:30) and day of broadcast (from Wednesday to Thursday night and back again). Edith Meiser wrote the scripts during these years, intermingling her own works with stories from the Arthur Conan Doyle canon. She wrote more than one hundred original radio scripts, many of which were repeated several times throughout the series' long run. Some were faithfully adapted from the original stories, and others were loosely based upon incidents mentioned in Conan Doyle's writings. Meiser always insisted that the tales be set in their proper period of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, unlike the Holmes films of the early 1930s and '40s, which set them in modern times.

On November 11, 1934, a new actor donned Holmes' deerstalker cap. He was the English actor Louis Hector, who had previously played Holmes' arch-enemy, Professor Moriarty, in the radio series. The former Holmes, Richard Gordon, thought he should be paid twice as much, because of the broadcasting procedure of doing one show for the East Coast and a repeat performance for the West Coast. The producers thought otherwise. Hector's debut performance was entitled *The Hebraic Breastplate*. The season ran through May 26th, 1935, Sundays on NBC Blue, changing timeslots from 4 p.m. to 9:45 on January 6.

Later that year, William Gillette was asked to appear before the microphone one more time, for *The Lux Radio Theatre*. So, on November 18, 1935, he portrayed Holmes in an hour-long version of his own play, adapted for radio by (who else?) Edith Meiser.

A new Holmes series, sponsored by Household Finance, debuted over Mutual on February 1, 1936. With the death of Leigh Lovell in 1935, Harry West now played Dr. Watson. Returning as the man of inference and deduction was a presumably chastened Richard Gordon. The series moved from Mutual to NBC on October 1, 1936, its final broadcast airing on December 24. Then the series was off the airwaves until 1939. However, radio wasn't completely devoid of Sherlock Holmes during those three years, thanks to—Orson Welles.

To be continued.....



When Radio Was Program Guide

November 1997 - January 1998

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.

NOVEMBER 1997

Broadcast Week One

The Shadow 10-9-38 "Death Stalks The Shadow" w/ Bill Johnstone / **Burns & Allen** 1-22-48 w/ Walter O'Keefe (part 1)

Burns & Allen 1-22-48 w/ Walter O'Keefe (part 2) / **The Green Hornet** 1-27-48 "Hit and Run" w/ Robert Hall

Dragnet 11-29-51 "The Big Affair" w/ Jack Webb / **The Aldrich Family** 11-25-48 "Grab-Bag at Springers" w/ Ezra Stone (Part 1)

The Aldrich Family 11-25-48 "Grab-Bag at Springers" w/ Ezra Stone (part 2) / **Box Thirteen** 7-5-48 "The Haunted Artist" w/ Alan Ladd

The Six Shooter 11-15-53 "Sheriff Ponset" w/ James Stewart / **The Adventures of Superman** 2-12-40 "The Baby From Krypton" w/ Bud Collyer (1st show in series)

Broadcast Week Two

Gangbusters 1940s "The Metropolitan Motor Mob" / **Fibber McGee & Molly** 1-29-46 "Molly's Card Party" w/ Jim and Marian Jordan (part 1)

Fibber McGee & Molly 1-29-46 "Molly's Card Party" w/ Jim and Marian Jordan (Part 2) / **Gunsmoke** 10-31-52 "The Overland Express" w/ William Conrad

Suspense 12-12-46 "They Call Me Patrice" w/ Susan Peters / **The Jack Benny Program** 4-7-46 w/ Van Johnson (Part 1)

The Jack Benny Program 4-7-46 w/ Van Johnson (part 2) / **Escape** 7-26-53 "The Notebook" w/ John Dehner

Have Gun, Will Travel 12-14-58 "The Outlaw" w/ John Dehner / **The Adventures of Superman** 2-14-40 "Clark Kent, Mild Mannered Reporter" w/ Bud Collyer Episode #2

Broadcast Week Three

Tales of the Texas Rangers 7-20-52 "Round Trip" w/ Joel McCrea / **The Edgar Bergen & Charlie McCarthy Show** 12-10-44 (part 1)

The Edgar Bergen & Charlie McCarthy Show 12-10-44 (part 2) / **Tarzan, Lord of the Jungle** 1950s "Tarzan's Mistake" w/ Lamont Johnson

Boston Blackie 9-24-46 "The Abbott Painting" w/ Dick Kollmar / **The Lum & Abner Show** 2-27-49 "Who Called Lum?" w/ Chester Lauck and Norris Goff (part 1)

The Lum & Abner Show 2-27-49 "Who Called Lum?" w/ Chester Lauck and Norris Goff (part 2) / **Crime Classics** 6-20-53 "James Fisk, Jr." w/ Lou Merrill and Bill Johnstone

The Shadow 1-30-38 "The Poison Death" w/ Bill Johnstone / **The Adventures of Superman** 2-16-40 "Keno's Landslide" w/ Bud Collyer Episode #3

Broadcast Week Four

The Whistler 8-20-47 "The Girl Next Door" w/ Bill Foreman / **My Favorite Husband** 12-9-49 "French Lessons" w/ Lucille Ball and Richard Denning (part 1)

My Favorite Husband 12-9-49 "French Lessons" w/ Lucille Ball (part 2) / **The Lone Ranger** 7-4-45 "Two For Fuzzy" w/ Brace Beemer

Suspense 3-24-49 "Dead Ernest" w/ Pat O'Brien / **The Great Gildersleeve** 9-9-45 "Leroy Gets a New Teacher" w/ Hal Peary (part 1)

The Great Gildersleeve 9-9-45 "Leroy Gets a New Teacher" w/ Hal Peary (part 2) / **Broadway Is My Beat** 7-28-49 "Paul Thomas Case" w/ Larry Thor

The Columbia Workshop 4-13-46 "Joe Peabody's Dream" w/ Bob Donnelly / **The Adventures of Superman** 2-19-40 "Clark Kent Imprisoned" w/ Bud Collyer Episode #4

DECEMBER 1997

Broadcast Week One

Nick Carter, Master Detective 12-25-43 "The Christmas Adventure" w/ Lon Clark / **The Adventures of Ozzie & Harriet** 12-19-48 "Sensible Christmas Gifts" (part 1)

The Adventures of Ozzie & Harriet 12-19-48 "Sensible Christmas Gifts" (part 2) / **The Man Called X** 12-23-50 "Thurston's Christmas Story" w/ Herbert Marshall

Escape 12-24-47 "Back For Christmas" w/ Paul Frees and Eleanor Audley / **The Martin & Lewis Show** 12-20-51 w/ guest, Tony Martin (part 1)

The Martin & Lewis Show 12-20-51 w/ guest, Tony Martin (part 2) / **Tales of the Texas Rangers** 12-24-50 "Christmas Present" w/ Joel McCrea

The Damon Runyon Theatre 11-28-50 "Dancing Dan's Christmas" w/ John Brown / **The Adventures of Superman** 2-23-40 "Menace to the Silver Clipper" w/ Bud Collyer Episode #5

Broadcast Week Two

The Saint 12-24-50 "Santa Claus is No Saint" w/ Vincent Price / **The Great Gildersleeve** 12-21-49 "The Engagement Ring" w/ Hal Peary (part 1)

The Great Gildersleeve 12-21-49 "The Engagement Ring" w/ Hal Peary (part 2) / **Pat Novak, For Hire** 1949 "Christmas Story" w/ Jack Webb

Rocky Fortune 12-22-53 "Plot to Murder Santa Claus" w/ Frank Sinatra / **The Milton Berle Show** 12-23-47 "Salute to Christmas" w/ Milton Berle (part 1)

The Milton Berle Show 12-23-47 "Salute to Christmas" (part 2) / **Broadway Is My Beat** 12-24-49 "The Nick Norman Case" w/ Larry Thor

The Edgar Bergen & Charlie McCarthy Show 12-24-44 w/ Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy / **The Adventures of Superman** 2-26-40 "Dr. Dahlgren's Atomic Beam" w/ Bud Collyer Episode #6

Broadcast Week Three

Richard Diamond Private Detective 12-24-49 "Adaptation of A Christmas Carol" w/ Dick Powell / **The Phil Harris & Alice Faye Show** 12-18-49 "Christmas Tree for City Hall" w/ Phil Harris & Alice Faye (part 1)

The Phil Harris & Alice Faye Show 12-18-49 "Christmas Tree for City Hall" (part 2) / **The CBS Radio Workshop** 12-23-56 "All is Bright" w/ Rudolph Weiss and Joseph Julian

When Radio Was Program Guide

November 1997 - January 1998 Continued

Boston Blackie 12-24-47 "The Stolen Rings" w/ Dick Kollmar / **The Abbott & Costello Show** 12-20-45 "Christmas Show of 1945" w/ Bud Abbott & Lou Costello (part 1)

The Abbott & Costello Show 12-20-45 "Christmas Show of 1945" (part 2) / **Suspense** 12-21-50 "A Christmas For Carol" w/ Dennis Day

My Favorite Husband 12-23-49 "The Sleigh Ride" w/ Lucille Ball and Richard Denning / **The Adventures of Superman** 2-28-40 "Atomic Fuel Cylinders Stolen" w/ Bud Collyer Episode #7

Broadcast Week Four

Dragnet 12-22-49 "The .22 Rifle for Christmas" w/ Jack Webb / **Fibber McGee & Molly** 12-15-42 "Misplaced Christmas Money" w/ Jim and Marian Jordan (part 1)

Fibber McGee & Molly 12-15-42 "Misplaced Christmas Money" (part 2) / **Casey, Crime Photographer** 12-25-47 "Santa Claus of Bum Blvd" w/ Staats Cottsworth

The Screen Director's Playhouse 5-8-49 "It's a Wonderful Life" w/ Jimmy Stewart / **The Red Skelton Show** 12-19-51 "The Little Christmas Tree" w/ Red and all his gang (part 1)

The Red Skelton Show 12-19-51 "The Little Christmas Tree" / **The Jack Benny Program** 12-26-43 "Christmas at Jack's House" w/ Jack Benny and all his gang

The Life of Riley 12-27-47 "TV Set for Christmas" w/ William Bendix / **The Adventures of Superman** 3-1-40 "Threat to the Daily Planet" w/ Bud Collyer Episode #8

Broadcast Week Five

Suspense 12-28-58 "32nd of December" w/ Frank Lovejoy and Joan Banks / **The Mel Blanc Show** 12-31-46 "The Man of the Year" w/ Mel Blanc (part 1)

The Mel Blanc Show 12-31-46 "The Man of the Year" (part 2) / **The Whistler** 12-31-47 "The First Year" w/ Bill Foreman

The Great Gildersleeve 12-30-45 "New Year's Eve Blues" w/ Hal Peary / **The Burns & Allen Show** 12-30-48 "New Year's Party" w/ George Burns & Gracie Allen (part 1)

JANUARY 1998

Broadcast Week One

The Burns & Allen Show 12-30-48 "New Year's Show" w/ George Burns & Gracie Allen (part 2) / **Four Star Playhouse** 8-14-49 "The Hunted" w/ Robert Cummings, Rosalind Russell, Fred MacMurray and Loretta Young

Arch Oboler's Plays 8-2-45 "Parade" w/ Van Heflin / **The Adventures of Superman** 3-4-40 "Fire in the Sterling Building" w/ Bud Collyer Ep. #9

Broadcast Week Two

The Green Hornet 2-16-47 "The State's Witness" w/ Robert Hall / **The Marlin Hurt and Beulah Show** 8-13-45 "Summer Heat" w/ Marlin Hurt (part 1)

The Marlin Hurt and Beulah Show 8-13-45 "Summer Heat" w/ Marlin Hurt (part 2) / **Suspense** 9-16-48 "Hitchhike Poker" w/ Gregory Peck

Box Thirteen 9-27-48 "Hunt and Peck" w/ Alan Ladd / **Fibber McGee & Molly** 2-5-46 "Ice Skating" w/ Jim and Marian Jordan (part 1)

Fibber McGee & Molly 2-5-46 "Ice Skating" (part 2) / **Mr. President** 9-1-53 "James Monroe" w/ Edward Arnold

The Shadow 1938 "Death From the Deep" w/ Orson Welles and Agnes Moorehead / **The Adventures of Superman** 3-6-40 "The Stabbing on June Anderson" w/ Bud Collyer Episode #10

Broadcast Week Three

This Is Hollywood 11-30-46 "Notorious Gent" w/ Rex Harrison & Lilli Palmer / **The Jack Benny Program** 1-9-49 w/ guest, James Stewart (part 1)

The Jack Benny Program 1-9-49 w/ guest, James Stewart (part 2) / **Dragnet** 8-24-50 "The Big Chance" w/ Jack Webb

The Six Shooter 4-15-54 "Crisis at Easter Creek" w/ James Stewart / **The Edgar Bergen & Charlie McCarthy Show** 5-2-48 w/ guest, Dr. Max Mason (part 1)

The Edgar Bergen & Charlie McCarthy Show 5-2-48 w/ guest, Dr. Max Mason (part 2) / **The Adventures of Michael Shayne, Private Detective** 8-26-46 "Poet Van Allen Haven" w/ Wally Mahr and Cathy Lewis

Escape 4-28-50 "Something For Nothing" w/ William Conrad / **The Adventures of Superman** 3-8-40 "The North Star Mining Company" w/ Bud Collyer Episode #11

Broadcast Week Four

Gangbusters 1940s "Supersonic Safecrackers" / **The Great Gildersleeve** 9-16-45 "Leroy is Expelled" w/ Hal Peary (part 1)

The Great Gildersleeve 9-16-45 "Leroy is Expelled" (part 2) / **The Man Called X** 8-15-48 "Majori Art Collection" w/ Herbert Marshall

The Whistler 12-16-51 "Curiosity Killed the Cat" w/ Bill Foreman / **My Favorite Husband** 1-6-50 "Question of Another Woman" w/ Lucille Ball (part 1)

My Favorite Husband 1-6-50 "Question of Another Woman" (part 2) / **Boston Blackie** 9-24-45 "Westfield Diamond" w/ Dick Kollmar

Suspense 9-11-47 "The Twist" w/ Michael O'Shea / **The Adventures of Superman** 3-11-40 "Aboard the Steamship Madison" w/ Bud Collyer Episode #12

Broadcast Week Five

Tales of the Texas Rangers 3-18-51 "Death By Adoption" w/ Joel McCrea / **The Life of Riley** 10-5-46 "Good Neighbors" w/ William Bendix (part 1)

The Life of Riley 10-5-46 "Good Neighbors" (part 2) / **Have Gun, Will Travel** 1-11-50 "Ranch Owner" w/ John Dehner

The Lone Ranger 7-11-45 "Ambush" w/ Bronson Beyer / **The Abbott & Costello Show** 3-10-44 w/ Bud Abbott & Lou Costello (part 1)

The Abbott & Costello Show 3-10-44 (part 2) / **Gunsmoke** 11-7-52 "Tara" w/ William Conrad

The Shadow 1938 "Blind Beggar Dies" w/ Orson Welles and Agnes Moorehead / **The Adventures of Superman** 3-13-40 "The Plane to Canyon City" w/ Bud Collyer Episode #13

Ol' Blue Eyes on Radio

For decades, Frank Sinatra has been a star on records, in movies, on television and in live concerts—so it's no surprise to learn that he also did a fair number of broadcasts during the golden age of radio. He was a regular on *Your Hit Parade* in 1943-44, and had his own program for Vimms Vitamins the next year. Series for Max Factor and Old Gold Cigarettes aired in 1945 and '46, followed by another program for Lucky Strike in '49. Naturally, Frank also made a number of guest appearances on variety shows and for the Armed Forces Radio Service.

Eighteen episodes of Sinatra's most unusual radio venture, however, have just been made available by Radio Spirits—a dramatic series on NBC entitled **Rocky Fortune** (6 audiocassettes; \$34.98). The period covered by these shows, October 1953 through March 1954, was a transitional time for Sinatra; he'd been considered washed up, but was starting to re-establish himself as a recording artist at Capitol Records. He was about to re-emerge as a dramatic actor in *From Here to Eternity*. And he was about to free himself from a tumultuous marriage to Ava Gardner (the second show included here, "Shipboard Jewel Robbery," originally aired on October 27, 1953, the date that Frank and Ava officially announced their pending divorce).

In these 18 shows, Sinatra isn't cast as a standard radio gumshoe, but instead as "a footloose and fancy-free young man drifting from one adventurous job to another." Still, the story lines follow the usual detective-story format, as can be gathered from the episode titles: "Messenger for Murder," "Rodeo Murder," "The Museum Murder," etc. There are some deviations from this formula though, with "Companion to a Chimp" and "Hauling Nitro," the latter probably inspired by the 1952 movie *Wages of Fear*. Sinatra narrates the stories in a Damon Runyonesque first person present tense, and occasionally has fun with his character: "Hey, d'j'ever notice how every week I get dragged or thrown into a homicidal picnic where I get pushed around?"

The scripts by Ernest Kinoy and George Lefferts are quite well done, and the radio pros in the supporting casts are tops as usual. Available from Radio Spirits, Inc., P.O. Box 2141, Schiller Park IL 60176; (800) RADIO-48.

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Lucy's Radio Husband

Unquestionably, the pinnacle of Lucille Ball's career was the 1951-57 period of *I Love Lucy*, one of the greatest TV comedies. Thanks to the enduring fame of that series, there's also been a great deal of interest in the radio show which laid the groundwork for the TV classic: **My Favorite Husband**, which co-starred Lucy with Richard Denning as Liz and George Cooper, "two people who live together and like it." Eighteen sterling examples of the series have just been released by Radio Spirits (six 90-minute cassettes; \$34.98).

Liz was a housewife, prone to outlandish schemes. George was a banker, not a Cuban bandleader; the couple's best friends were George's boss, Rudolph Atterbury (Gale Gordon) and his wife, Iris (Bea Benaderet). While the roles and actors are different, there's enough relation to Ricky Ricardo and Fred and Ethel Mertz so that one can easily imagine these scripts as *I Love Lucy* episodes. In fact, six of the radio shows were adapted into *Lucy* scripts, as helpfully noted on the collection's packaging.

While the radio series may not have spawned an episode as well-remembered as, say, the "Vitameatavegamin" show, there's certainly much to enjoy. "Over Budget," from January 7, 1949, is very funny, with Liz having to stretch the dollars by serving beans every night. Before long, everything reminds her of the legume—the family radio blaring out with "Ciribiribin," a theatre running *Christopher Bean*, and so on.

Denning, Gordon and Benaderet are excellent (the latter two were supposed to play Fred and Ethel Mertz in the new TV show, but Gordon was already committed to TV's *Our Miss Brooks* and Bea already playing Blanche Morton on the Burns & Allen TV show). The fine scripts were written by Bob Carroll, Jr. and Madelyn Pugh, and the show was produced by Jess Oppenheimer—the team that would later be the backbone of TV's greatest success.

The sound quality is excellent on these complete shows (although in at least one instance, a Jello commercial is replaced by a vintage anti-communism public service announcement!). This was a fine series in its own right, one which holds up very well after almost fifty years. (Available from Radio Spirits, P.O. Box 2141, Schiller Park IL 60176; (800) RADIO-48.)

A Tepid Look at "Hot" Radio

Long ago, broadcasting had a quaint concept called "standards." Certain expressions were thought unfit for the public airwaves. Nevertheless, occasionally a few lapses occurred during live broadcasts. Some memorable examples are included in **Too Hot For Radio**, a collection available as five CDs (GAA Corporation 49501; \$39.95) or as five cassettes (43501; \$29.95).

The best part of this collection is the first disc/cassette, an hour-long documentary produced and hosted by radio historian Anthony Tollin—who also wrote the excellent and well-illustrated 56-page booklet which accompanies the recordings.

The documentary includes interview segments with Edgar Bergen and Don Ameche about the infamous "Garden of Eden" sketch with guest Mae West. Orson Welles and John Houseman recall the "War of the Worlds" show, Welles admitting that he anticipated the riotous reaction. Some of the excerpts included were not actually broadcast, including recorded self-parodies by the casts of *The Guiding Light* and *Gunsmoke*. The documentary takes a left turn midway through and becomes a more generic profile of radio during World War II.

The other four discs contain either complete shows or lengthy excerpts. The *Chase and Sanborn Hour* with the "Garden of Eden" sketch is included in adequate sound. An Abbott & Costello show weighs in at 21:00, followed by a scene from an *Amos 'n' Andy* show (which on the CD strangely has an index point placed midway through, reflecting the cassette version's halfway point). A 1940 *Shadow* show (edited to 24:55) was evidently gruesome enough to prompt listener complaints.

Arthur Godfrey's on-the-air firing of Julius LaRosa is heard in a five-minute clip; Jack Benny and Tony Curtis cavort in a 1953 episode with one questionable gag; the *Gunsmoke* cast romps through a very blue (and funny) rehearsal for a 1956 episode, "The New Hotel." The memorable show wherein Charlie McCarthy almost marries Marilyn Monroe is presented here in feeble sound quality, but a *Command Performance* with Hope, Crosby, Gypsy Rose Lee and Betty Hutton is in fairly good shape. One wishes that the sound quality were better overall, but there are enough highlights to warrant buying this collection. (Info: GAA Corporation, 33 Portman Rd., New Rochelle NY 10801; (914) 576-7660.)

Tunes from the Tube: Ernie Kovacs' Mad Music

We remember Ernie Kovacs as a great visual comedian—one who helped develop the new medium of television with many innovative tricks. What we forget is that his comedy also tickled the ear, not only with his own droll humor (the poetry readings of Percy Dovetonsils, the fractured fairy tales of Pierre Ragout) but with a wildly imaginative and offbeat variety of music. Some of Ernie's best sketches featured inanimate objects springing to life and dancing to a particular theme, such as the office furniture that frolics to "Jalousie."



Listening to the new CD **The Ernie Kovacs Record Collection** (Varèse Sarabande VSD 5789; \$15.98) is like rummaging through Ernie's very eclectic collection of classical numbers, lounge-pop and novelty 78s. If you're familiar with his TV work, these themes will conjure up memories of the wacky video that accompanied them; if you've yet to experience the joys of Kovacs, you'll still enjoy the music, which ranges from serious to quirky to out-and-out weird. Unless Kovacs' widow Edie Adams still had Ernie's actual record collection (possible, given her blessed tenacity in preserving his kinescopes and video tapes), one wonders how co-producer Irwin Chusid located some of these rarities.

The ragtime piano number which served as Ernie's theme song for a decade, "Oriental Blues" (based on George Gershwin's 1916 "Rialto Ripples"), is heard here in full, played by the Tony DeSimone Trio. The tune played by the Nairobi Trio (three deadpan gorillas in derbies and frock coats), turns out to be "Solfeggio" by harpist Robert Maxwell and the Ray Charles Singers; the music which accompanied Percy Dovetonsils' poems is Les Baxter's 1946 "Celestial Nocturne." Vocals by Yma Sumac (whose voice ranged five octaves) and Leona Anderson (whose range was no octaves at all) are equally incredible. The rendition of "Mack the Knife" which accompanied Ernie's blackout gags is here too, in a gloriously nasal, "r"-rolling performance by Wolfgang Neuss.

Ernie is heard singing a bizarre country song called "Hot Cakes and Sausage" and joining with Edie for "The Wrong Man" and a tradition-breaking rendition of "Indian Love Call." Each track yields its own delights, and heard consecutively they convey the wide range and intelligence of Kovacs' humor. Irwin Chusid's booklet notes, Chris Ware's design and the sound restoration by Bill Inglot and Dan Hersch help make this a delightful package. (Available from Varèse Sarabande, 11846 Ventura Blvd., Studio City CA 91604.)

Beyond Norton: The Lives of Art Carney

It's fascinating to speculate what Art Carney's career would have been like if he hadn't become famous as the goofy, gangly sewer worker Ed Norton, lovable sidekick to Jackie Gleason's bus-driving Ralph Kramden in the '50s TV classic *The Honeymooners*. He might, of course, be a total unknown. Conversely, he might be even more respected for his work in radio drama. (He was a prolific actor in that medium, performing on *Dimension X*, *Gangbusters*, *The Henry Morgan Show*, *Land of the Lost*, *Lorenzo Jones* and even a comedy show called *Joe and Ethel Turp*; he regularly appeared as FDR on *The March of Time*.) He might be renowned as a great stage actor, having originated the role of Felix Unger in Neil Simon's *The Odd Couple* (his dual-role performance in the 1968 play *Lovers* brought him a Tony nomination). Or he might be thought of as one of our finest film actors (his movies include *Harry and Tonto*, for which he won the 1974 Best Actor Oscar).

But Ed Norton is the image that's indelibly linked with Carney. In **Art Carney: A Biography** (Fromm International; 256 pages, hardcover; \$24.95), Michael Seth Starr—TV columnist for the *New York Post*—probes beneath the surface to show the sensitive and tormented soul behind Norton's placid exterior.

Despite the triumphs of his career, Carney was plagued by alcoholism, clinical depression, and an extremely introverted personality. He seems to have conquered the first two demons, but remains reclusive; he chose not to participate in this biography. Nevertheless, Starr has interviewed a wide variety of Carney's personal and professional associates, who describe a kind man, basically gentle despite occasional outbursts, who has never quite believed he was as talented as everyone else seemed to think. This is a straightforward book; Starr doesn't unduly dwell on the darker aspects of Carney's life but instead paints a balanced picture of a fine actor and a fascinating man. (Available in bookstores.)

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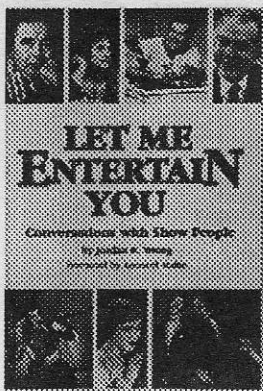
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Radio's Biggest Show

By Frank Bresee

Al Jolson called himself "The World's Greatest Entertainer," and Wheaties sang its own praises as "the best breakfast food in the land!" Both Jolie and Wheaties had a point—and it can best be summed up with the charismatic colloquialism, *chutzpah!*

Radio, as we remember and love it, had *chutzpah* too. In the early 1950s, almost beaten by a younger opponent

which could show as well as tell, radio entertainment returned in a big way to the airwaves. Radio may have been down but it wasn't out—not just yet—and it made a valiant attempt to win back its audience with one really big show. The program was a salute to radio in the truest sense of the word, and had style and taste.

Big time network broadcasting ended with one of the greatest shows in its distinguished history—a 90-minute weekly spectacular heard coast-to-coast. The program was simply called *The Big Show*. It was the last gasp of radio's golden age.

On Sunday evening, November 5, 1950, over the NBC Radio Network, the beginning of the beginning of the end began. And it began exactly like this, with an announcement from a certain distinguished Miss Bankhead:

TALLULAH: You are about to be entertained by some of the biggest names in show business. For the next hour and thirty minutes, this program will present the most scintillating personalities in the entertainment world. And my name, dah-lings, is Tallulah Bankhead!

And so it went—with volumes of laughter, an abundance of music and the most entertaining array of stars ever assembled for any weekly radio program.

NBC pulled off the greatest coup-de-theatre ever attempted. Besides the husky-voiced Mistress of Ceremonies, every week the program proudly paraded a panorama of radio personalities, including such great stars as Fred Allen, Jimmy Durante, Ethel Merman, Bob Hope, Dean Martin & Jerry Lewis, Eddie Cantor, Groucho Marx and Louis Armstrong. (The show of December 17, 1950, just to cite one example, had as guest stars Hope, Armstrong, Martin & Lewis, Deborah Kerr, Frankie Laine and Dorothy McGuire!)

The Big Show was a product of radio's finest talents. It was scripted by Goodman Ace, truly an ace comedy writer. The announcers were veterans Jimmy Wallington and Ed Herlihy and the orchestra was led by Meredith Willson—who'd had a lengthy radio association with Burns & Allen and who would later delight Broadway audiences with *The Music Man*. For 90 hilarious minutes each week, Tallulah battled against the enemy—television.

The great Milton Berle, hailed as "Mr. Television," agreed to appear as guest on one of the shows. Remember, *The Big Show* began in 1950. Mr. Berle was the King of Television and Tallulah was the Queen of the Kilocycles. During the program, the insults ricocheted across the microphone. After a particularly brilliant squelch from the hostess, Berle ad-libbed: "I wish I had said that!"—to which Tallulah replied: "You will!"

The audience roared and declared the battle between radio and TV a draw. Berle returned to the new marvel called television.

No question about it, TV was an entertainment giant that quickly dwarfed all other forms of show business. Sadly, on April 20, 1952, even *The Big Show* yelled "Uncle!" (I often think it must have yelled "Uncle Miltie!") And so, the show ended—Tallulah stepped before the microphone and in her famous baritone sang Meredith Willson's brilliant closing number for the last time. This was the "swan song" of radio's last hurrah:

"May the good Lord bless and keep you, whether near or far away; May you find that long awaited golden day, today. May your troubles all be small ones, and your fortunes ten times ten; May the good Lord bless and keep you, till we—meet—again."

It was often said that Tallulah never really cried—she only wept "on cue." Well, I think there were genuine tears in her eyes as she sang the final chorus that rang down the curtain on the program. In fact, I'd be willing to bet on it.

Tallulah Bankhead was a professional and one of the greatest stars ever to shine in the constellation called show business. Without a doubt, she must have known that it wasn't just *The Big Show* saying farewell that night—it was big-time radio saying "Good-bye."

Broadcaster-historian Frank Bresee is the longtime host of "The Golden Days of Radio."

RADIO'S GOLDEN YEARS.
by FRANK BRESEE & BOBB LYNES

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Pop Culture

The Lone Eagle

Charles Lindbergh was, in some ways, the "plucky, lucky Lindy" celebrated in pop songs of the 1920s. He was indeed absolutely sure of his own beliefs, supremely self-confident; when he made his 1927 non-stop flight from New York to Paris, he didn't even pack a parachute.

However, as we learn in the fine 1990 documentary *Lindbergh*, newly available on VHS videocassettes from Shanachie Entertainment (60 minutes, b&w and color; \$19.95), the ex-mail pilot didn't relate to people very well, and found comfort only in the solitude of a plane, far above his troubles. He had always longed to escape—but once he'd made his pioneering flight, Lindbergh became an absolute prisoner of his celebrity, unable to avoid the '20s and '30s equivalent of paparazzi. He found lasting happiness in his marriage to Anne Morrow, but fame brought deep sorrow with the kidnapping and murder of his infant son. This, alas, only intensified the media's intrusion into Lindbergh's life, and ultimately he moved his family to Europe, where he became alarmingly friendly with many top Nazis.

Fame does not equal greatness, and Lindbergh on the ground was definitely an idol with clay feet. He didn't realize that the Nazis were using him as a propaganda tool, publicizing his admiration for their Luftwaffe. And when war clouds darkened and Lindbergh returned to the States, he remained bewilderingly blind to the evils of the Nazis, becoming a very public spokesman for America-firsters. He was denounced by FDR, shunned even by other pacifists. After a Nazi concentration camp had been liberated, a Jewish boy—until recently a prisoner—showed Lindbergh the cremation ovens. Lindbergh equated the Nazi "solution" with America's killing of the Japanese, unable to comprehend the difference between the slaughter of innocents and the justified punishment of evildoers.

Lindbergh's widow and children, among other associates, recount his bitter-sweet story. This documentary tells us, of course, that fame can have tragic consequences; it also leads one to reflect that public admiration is swiftly bestowed upon people who may not ultimately deserve it. (Shanachie Entertainment: 1-800-497-1043.)

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Past Times' Most Wanted Videos

We enjoy a wealth of new products on video, but there are a few mystifying gaps. We offer our "Most Wanted" list and invite readers to send us their wish lists:

Laurel & Hardy's Talkies: Shabbily treated on home video in the US, the Hal Roach shorts and features deserve remastering.

W.C. Fields: When, oh, when will Universal Home Video bring out *The Old-Fashioned Way*, *The Man on the Flying Trapeze*, *You're Telling Me* and *Million Dollar Legs*? All of them gems, all unavailable.

Love Me Tonight: A 1932 gem with Chevalier, Jeanette MacDonald and a Rodgers-Hart score. On cable TV, but not on video.

Hollywood Hotel: The film which gave us "Hooray for Hollywood," not to mention priceless footage of Benny Goodman's prime band, and fine comedy with Dick Powell, Edgar Kennedy and Hugh Herbert.

Popeye Cartoons: The classic Betty Boop Fleischer cartoons have finally been released properly, but just try to find any of the great early '30s black and white Popeyes.

Harold Lloyd: HBO Video botched the VHS release of Lloyd's silent classics; they were announced but evidently never manufactured. *Why Worry*, *Grandma's Boy*, *Girl Shy* and others are well worthy of release.

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| "El Rancho Grande" w/ Bing Crosby | "Victory March" w/ Dick Powell |
| "Nobody's Sweetheart" | "Ida! Sweet as Apple Cider" |
| "Oh, Lady, Be Good!" | "Whittle Out a Whistle" |
| "There'll Be Some Changes Made" | "The Girl With the Broomhandle Legs" |
| "Ragtime Cowboy Joe" w/ Pinky Tomlin | "Sweet Potato Piper" w/ Crosby |
| "Blue (and Broken-Hearted)" | "Siam" |
| "Sweet Georgia Brown" | "A Bungalow, A Piccolo and You" |
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