

Volume 35, Number 1

January/February, 2010

NOTE: Starting with this issue, we have a new newsletter publishing schedule. See the "Message from the President" on page 8.

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# **ARCH OBOLER:** EVERYMAN'S THEATER (Part Two)

by Martin Grams, Jr.

As a result of the cancellation of Arch Oboler's Plays, Arch Oboler turned to NBC and Proctor and Gamble to support a new dramatic series written, produced and directed by who else? Arch Oboler. The series was entitled Arch Oboler's Plays.

Broadcast on Friday evenings, each episode opened and closed with Richard Strauss' "Death and Transfiguration." Everyman's Theater was originally signed to twenty-six episode presentation but came out to twenty-five instead. The reason was because the broadcast of November 1940 1. was pre-empted for presidential speech. Many of the presentations were repeat performances of previous scripts. The premiere broadcast (October 4. featured Alla Nazimova reprising her role for "This Lonely Heart," which she performed a year before on Plays. On October 18, Boris

Karloff reprised his role in "Cat Wife," from a 1938

broadcast of Lights Out. Husband and wife Elsa Lanchester and Charles Laughton co-starred in "The Flying Yorkshireman" on November 15. important was the impressive guest list for this short-run series. Norma Shearer, Brian Donlevy, Marlene Dietrich, Lee J. Cobb and many others were guests.

Oboler was not at all astonished that such theatrical lights were anxious to deliver his lines. "I have a respect for the medium I am working in," said Oboler in the December 2, 1940 issue of Time Magazine. Proctor and Gamble paid Oboler \$4,000

> a week – a meager pay for most producers who did all the tasks including writing the scripts and direction. His contract with the sponsor gave him the last word on all problems connected with Everyman's Theater. Out of the \$4,000, Oboler paid the actors (his top was \$1,000) and musicians, sometimes spending as much as \$3,600 to put a show across.

As it turned out, one of the costlier productions was "This Lonely Heart" for which he hired a full symphony orchestra to weave in a bit of Tchaikovsky. Like Clifford Odets, his opposite number in the theater, Oboler



Bette Davis - An Oboler favorite star

could not work without music and always made it a (Continued on Page 3)

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2010 Convention Schedules

At this time we have not been made aware of any upcoming OTR Conventions

point to listen to recordings of Beethoven, Moussorgsky, Sibelius and Debussy while composing his scripts.

The most important broadcast of the series, was perhaps also the most significant for the time. On November 29, 1940, Elisabeth Bergner starred in "An American is Born." This was Bergner's radio debut. The story (based on the Peter Jefferson Paker and Fanya Foss novelette) involved a small group of people who cross the Mexican border and wait the time they could come to the country under the quota. More specifically, it was the story of Marta and Karl Kroft who willingly met many trials in order that their child would be born in the free country. Dr. Frank Monaghan, an associate professor of history at Yale, was quoted a year later: "To many millions in Europe, America beckons forth as an earthly paradise because it is a land of freedom. They know the bitter taste of despotism, the heavy load of misery. Mr. Oboler has taken a small group of these unhappy men and women who yearn for the liberty which is America."

A little more than a year after this broadcast, on January 19, 1942, the DuPont-sponsored Cavalcade of America program presented "An American is Born" as part of their continuing series of weekly, half-hour dramas. Bette Davis played the role of Martha Kroft, and it was about this time that Oboler and Davis began admiring each other for their skills and talents. Davis would later star in many of Oboler's dramas sometimes without questioning what the scripts were about. When Oboler phoned Davis to tell him he had a script tailored for her, Davis accepted without hesitation. "Arch Oboler wrote this play more than a year ago," quoted Davis about her Cavalcade of America broadcast, "and then just a few days ago I read an item in my newspaper about a lady named Mrs. Lloyd B. Turner, wife of an American oil man in Venezuela. A few years ago, she started on a three thousand-mile journey home to Houston, Texas – to make sure her child would be born in the United States. That to me is evidence of a great faith."

Trivia: During the Cavalcade broadcast, an ear-phoned Oboler saw to it that a falling tree really sounded like a falling tree. Oboler saw to it that a real tree and real twigs, branches and undergrowth were collected for this one sound effect, a massive pile of two and a half feet, and flattened by two sound effects men.

Months after Everyman's Theater went off the

air, the United States declared war on Japan and the *Cavalcade* presentation of "An American is Born" had a deeper meaning than it had had before. Also, with the advent of war, Oboler joined up with other celebrities and radio talents to present a series of morale-boosting programs for the American radio listeners who remained at the home front. *Plays for Americans*, *To the President* and *Everything for the Boys* became staples in network broadcasting.

Dedicated to "people of good-will everywhere," Arch Oboler's *Plays for Americans* was designed as a weekly series of thirteen war-related broadcasts from February 1, 1942 to April 26, 1942. More amusing was the fact that the "powers that be" at the National Broadcasting Company received so many favorable replies from the listening audience regarding the dramatizations that they granted Oboler an extension of eight additional broadcasts in early April of 1942. (The final broadcast was heard on July 5, 1942, a total of 21 episodes.)

Oboler's skill as a radio playwright being so well established as to be taken for granted, his anger towards anyone related to the axis of evil was expressed in each script. In calmer days there might be room for esthetic argument about whether an artist did his best work at white heat or cool reflection. The significance of Oboler's series, *Plays for Americans*, and of the collection published in late 1941 under the title "This Freedom" (Random House, 1941), was that they were written for this time, and that behind them is the urgency of his indignation, general and specific. Had he waited or worked more slowly, they might have acquired a certain polish; almost certainly they would have lost a great deal of immediate force.

The U.S. entrance into the war had altered his approach somewhat. He was free to speak in terms the cautious networks had frowned upon before December 7, 1941. But even when he was under wraps, so to speak, Arch Oboler struck hard and bitterly and with the savage joy of an antagonist who fought with conviction. None but a dolt could have failed to see that in "And Adam Begot," a fantasy of time turned back and three civilized people confronted by a Neanderthal man, he was writing a parable of appeasement; or that he was flaying the self-centered, callous mind in "Special Hollywood," another time-fantasy; or that Hitler and his "voices" were the real subject of "Genghis Khan," the tale of a Harlem Negro run amok with a "spirit" at his side.

According to radio reviewer John K. Hutchens of the New York Times (March 8, 1942 issue): "Of the five plays heard thus far, the basic theme in three has been the awakening of the average man in time of crisis. 'Johnny Quinn, U.S.N.' told of a 'main chance' boy who woke up - and died at Pearl Harbor. 'Paul Revereski' was the tale of a lad whose pure patriotism worked sundry changes in his elders. 'Ghost Story,' recounted by 'a guy earning his living with his hands,' brought into sharp and agonizing focus the tragedy of Europe as told by its murdered dead. Of course they are not equally good as plays – what author could be counted upon for a first-rate one-act play every week? - but all of them have power. And one of them, 'Memo to Berchtesgaden,' a story of a German agent baffled by the Yankee mind, was rich in sly humor - surprisingly so, because humor is not Mr. Oboler's forte."

Unlike Oboler's previous radio series, *Plays for Americans* presented original dramas – no repeat performances of scripts used on other radio programs. But the Hollywood cast was impressive (again). Martha Scott, James Stewart, Thomas Mitchell, Raymond Massey, Olivia deHavilland, Jean Hersholt, Claude Rains, Conrad Veidt, Robert Taylor and Ralph Bellamy were a few of the guests. Alla Nazimova and Elizabeth Bergner also made a guest appearance. Bette Davis was heard on two broadcasts, the second of which is regarded as one of the best episodes of the series, "Adolf and Mrs. Runyon" on June 21, 1942.

Another series written, produced and directed by Arch Oboler for the war cause was To the President, broadcast from October 18, 1942 to December 20, 1942 for a total of ten broadcasts. Oboler publicly held that since President Roosevelt termed the present conflict a "people's war," it was within the province of the common people to speak to their leader without pulling punches in informing him what they were thinking about, laughing about and even crying about. Having conducted an extensive survey of a cross-section of the lives and opinions of American people at war, Oboler offered his report To the President through the medium of individual members of everyday American families, calling upon them to open their hearts to their Chief Executive.

Each program dealt with one American family, presenting in dramatic form actual incidents in the lives of its' members. In each case the character had their counterpart in every city and hamlet of the

land, with the main contention of the series being a refutation of the claim that the American people couldn't "take it" and that they wanted to win the war in the headlines.

Among the individuals and their families who spoke up were Mrs. Joe Cleary, whose husband was at Wake Island when the Japanese attacked; Jerry Douglas, a youth in his last year in high school, who was faced with a world in which he believed he had no future; Sam Adams, a farmer, who watched his family break up as its members took jobs in distant war industry plants. *To the President* was not documentary. Rather it was an entertaining presentation of the real life stories of men and women in a world at war.

On December 12, 1943 a press-release was issued: "Arch Oboler, writer and producer, is working out the details of a new venture entitled 'Command Theatre,' which should be coming along as a commercial next month over NBC. Ronald Colman is mentioned as master of ceremonies." Well, the press release was a little pre-mature. By the time Oboler's new venture premiere on January 18, 1944, the name of the program was changed to Everything for the Boys. The program's format also changed. Originally this series was to be a collaboration of Arch Oboler's writing and directing skills, along with Colman as host. A twenty-minute drama was to be acted out by a new guest each followed by a two-way short-wave week, conversation between the guests and servicemen stationed in foreign places. The drama of choice was supposed to be a selection of popular stage plays and novels made on the basis of careful surveys of service men's preferences. Oboler's task was to then adapt the novels and plays into feasible radio scripts, being allowed to submit one original of his own.

Shortly after the premiere broadcast, it was evident that *Everything for the Boys* was a disaster. Oboler lost control of the series and problems behind the microphone were kept from the eyes and ears of John Q. Public. Oboler paid for the rights to adapt "A Connecticut Yankee," "Rebecca," "Three Men on a Horse" and "Cyrano de Bergerac" for the program. Whether Oboler took the time to adapt them into feasible radio scripts is not known, but the stories were never dramatized on the show – a financial loss to Oboler. Forced to find substitutes, Oboler began using more than one of his own radio plays, previously dramatized on other programs. This went against the contract Auto-Lite (the

sponsor) signed with Oboler. Some internal correspondence suggests copyright issues halted the productions of those dramas. Also used as a last-minute solution, Oboler turned to Robert E. Sherwood and paid the playwright for the radio rights to most of Sherwood's stories such as "Lost Horizon" and "Berkeley Square."

Much good came from the *Everything for the Boys* broadcasts. Ingrid Bergman was a guest on April 25, 1944 in a dramatization of "Death Takes a Holiday" and afterwards, sang "As Time Goes By" from the 1942 movie, *Casablanca*. On June 6, 1944, Jimmy Durante was guest with Jose Iturbi in a drama entitled "Durante Takes Over." Edna Best and Loretta Young were featured in "Blithe Spirit" on May 16, 1944.



Ronald Colman

Ronald Colman also read letters and short essays for the troops, after every performance. On February 15, 1944, Colman read "High Flight" by John G. McGee. After the drama of March 21, 1944, Colman read a "Letter to General Montgomery from General Nye." After the drama of March 28, 1944, Colman read a "Letter to a Soldier's Wife from India."

On June 13, 1944, Dick Haymes made a guest appearance on the show with Claudette Colbert in "Reunion in Vienna" and this marked the transition from drama to music. Both Ronald Colman and Arch Oboler left the series in a dispute with the Auto-Lite Company. The sponsor apparently wanted more music incorporated and both Oboler and Colman wanted dramatic entertainment. Both men left the series and beginning with the broadcast of June 20, 1944, *Everything for the Boys* was revamped with Dick Haymes as the weekly star. The new version featured no dramas. Instead, poems were read and songs were sung. *Everything for the Boys* would remain a weekly musical production

until a year later when the series was last heard on June 25, 1945.

Arch Oboler's contribution to radio also expanded into the medium of television and motion pictures. His "And Adam Begot" drama from *Arch Oboler's Plays* and *Lights Out* was adapted for NBC-TV's *Lights Out* program starring Kent Smith in the lead. This was the only Oboler-scripted radio play to make the transition to the television counterpart of *Lights Out*. Although a recording of this "live" telecast does exist (thankfully), it was not well preserved. The kinescope deteriorated over time, but thankfully the program still remains visible.

During the early 1950s and throughout the early 1960s, Oboler wrote, produced and directed his own low-budget movies and sold them to distributors like United Artists and Columbia Pictures. Employing radio stars such as Hans Conried and Gloria Blondell for *The Twonky* (1953) and Susan Douglas for *Five* (1951). *Five*, incidentally, was a character study of how five survivors of an Atomic Holocaust managed to live among each other during an emergency situation. The movie was filmed on location at Oboler's real-life Frank Lloyd Wright home.

Although these articles describe the various programs Oboler wrote, produced and directed, this was not intended to cover everything about Oboler. These were merely a few brief glimpses to give the readers an idea of Oboler's scope and the diversity of his radio productions in support of the war cause.

Martin Grams, Jr. is the author and co-author of numerous books including: <u>The Sound of Detection:</u> <u>Ellery Queen's Adventures in Radio</u> (2002), <u>Inner Sanctum Mysteries: Behind the Creaking Door</u> (2003), and the highly-acclaimed <u>The Alfred Hitchcock Presents Companion</u> (2001).

# Commercial Boners Amuse Listeners (Part II)

By Danny Godwin

Radio Guide magazine was a publication where radio listeners could catch up with the latest news in the radio industry. There was an occasional feature in the magazine known as "Bulls and Boners." This section featured botched and misplaced lines the listeners caught on the air. There was no prize given for each boner that was published, except for the satisfaction of radio listeners catching the stars and announcers being human. Let's take a look at the commercial flubs that made the "Bulls and Boners" list.



Let's begin with a boner concerning a commercial for *Ivory Snow*. The announcer was supposed to ask the question, "Ladies, do you have a particular washable such as a housecoat or slip?" What the announcer actually said would include something that shouldn't be washed in *Ivory Snow*--- or any other soap! Here was what the announcer said: "Ladies, do you have a particular washable such as a *housecat* or slip?"

The announcer's question most likely caught many cat owners by surprise. They didn't know their feline companions could be washed in *Ivory Snow!* It does make one wonder how many people were scratched, bitten, and clawed when they took the announcer's "advice" and tried to wash their cats in *Ivory Snow!* 

The next boner concerned the misplacing of a word at a wrong place. It occurred during a commercial for *Cashmere Bouquet Soap* on the **NBC** (**Red**) serial *ELLEN RANDOLPH*. The listeners heard announcer Marvin Mueller (a.k.a. Marvin Miller) describe what should have been a

good bargain for *Cashmere Bouquet*. He was supposed to say, "*Cashmere Bouquet Soap*, 3 cakes for only 25¢." Unfortunately for Mueller, he misplaced a word and placed it in a wrong place. What he actually said made the *Colgate-Palmolive-Peet Company* sound like a cheapskate outfit. See if you can spot something wrong with Mueller's narration: "*Cashmere Bouquet Soap*, only 3 cakes for 25¢"

This boner was heard on the *BURNS AND ALLEN* program. Announcer Truman Bradley was presenting a commercial for *Hinds Honey & Almond Fragrance Cream*. In this example, an extra word was needed to make the message clear. If Bradley said it this way, he would have been OK: "No matter how hard you work, a man expects to have your hands that are exciting and feminine." Here was what Bradley said: "No matter how hard you work, a man expects to have hands that are exciting and feminine." If Bradley's comment was defined correctly, the husband expected to have exciting and feminine hands with the help of his wife. Can you picture a blue-collar hard working "he-man" with exciting, feminine hands?

This boner was heard during a baseball game on station **WCAU** in Philadelphia. The play-by-play announcer was getting ready for a commercial for Mobilgas. He was to say a brief introduction, then turn it over to the commercial spokesman. The introduction was supposed to go like this: "I will now turn you over to a congenial fellow who filled his car up with Mobilgas this morning." With 2 words missing, this was what he actually said: "I will now turn you over to a congenial fellow who filled up with Mobilgas this morning." The announcer made it sound like the commercial spokesman drank the gasoline. Now I'm wondering drinking Mobilgas provided "pick-me-up" in the morning as a cup of coffee?



In 1939, Ralph Edwards worked as an announcer on several radio programs. He would also come up with a bizarre boner when he presented a commercial for *Ivory Flakes*. Edwards said that *Ivory Flakes* prolonged stocking wear---which it did. He also mentioned a woman I'll refer to as "R.B.," who in Edwards' own words did something a little strange with her stockings. Here was what he said: "R. B. got 6 months' wear from 4 pairs of silk stockings, for she washed all 4 pairs every night when she took them off." Of course, wearing 1 pair of silk stockings would more than likely make R.B.'s legs look attractive, but wearing 4 pairs at once would just look silly!



This radio boner would get the men in the listening audience a little excited. It occurred on a 1940 broadcast of the LUX RADIO THEATER. The boner took place during a commercial for Lux **Toilet Soap**, the soap 9 out of 10 famous screen stars used. What the announcer was supposed to say should have been a comparison: "When you take this Lux whipped cream beauty bath, you will be sharing the same experience with many movie stars." With some needed words missing, the announcer made it sound like the Hollywood stars were willing to share their bath with the listeners: "When you take this *Lux* whipped cream beauty bath, you will be sharing it with many movie stars." Although the commercial was directed at the women in the listening audience, I wonder how many men would begin to use Lux Toilet Soap, so they could take the announcer's advice and hopefully share a bath with the likes of Betty Grable, Dorothy Lamour, Loretta Young, and other Hollywood stars who used and recommended Lux Toilet Soap.

A listener caught a boner on a commercial for *New England Laundry* on station **WTIC** in Hartford, Connecticut. It was the beginning of the holiday season-- - and with Christmas and New

Year's Day fast approaching, there would be parties and other social events to attend.

What the announcer really meant was for the listeners to have their clothes cleaned, so they could wear them at the holiday get-togethers. Somehow, that meaning got lost when the announcer said, "Sending your clothes to the New England Laundry increases your fun at this social season." Granted, doing this would increase the listeners' fun, but since it was in December, going to the social events in their birthday suits be a little chilly!

Unless you're Arthur Godfrey or Henry Morgan, it doesn't pay to insult the sponsor. With one word too many added to the commercial, Fletcher Wiley did just that, although it was unintentional. In describing his sponsor, Franco-American Macaroni & Cheese, Wiley was supposed to say something like this: "Franco-American contains a rich, creamy sauce that people can eat." Unfortunately, a word was added to make the product sound completely inedible: "Franco-American contains a rich, creamy sauce that few people can eat."

Let's conclude this article with a commercial with an agricultural background. The product in question was *Purina Cattle Feed*, and the commercial was heard on station **WLW** in Russellville, Arkansas. This commercial was amazing, because the listeners heard a dairy farmer feeding his cows *Purina Cattle Feed*— and would also develop some bovine features! Here was what the dairy farmer said: "Since I started feeding *Purina* to my dairy cows, I have cut <u>my</u> udder trouble down 50%." Personally, it's all well and good that *Purina* was doing good things for the farmer's udder, but did it help the cows?

### **A Word from the President** By Larry Weide

Hello everyone,

As announced under the front page banner, this month we're starting a new schedule for the publishing of our newsletter. After 35 years of providing a monthly newsletter to our members a decision has been made to now publish every other month. So, starting with this newsletter, you will see issues marked as Jan/Feb, Mar/Apr, etc.

The first reason, which I suspect that many of you will not find surprising, has to do with the rising cost of publishing, supplies <u>and</u> the diminishing income the club is experiencing through reduced media rentals and dues - our only source of income.

The second reason, as equally important, is that we need to reduce the newsletter publishing workload. Much of this work has been tirelessly borne by one person for most of these years and that would be Maletha King. Since the early 80s Maletha has been responsible for;

- Newsletter labels, postage and mailing
- Membership records administration
- The reel-to-reel library archive and maintenance
- Cassette tape creation
- Club banking and accounting
- Club equipment inventory

So, at this time we find it necessary to find a way to defray some of our costs and relieve Maletha of some of the monthly work. Unfortunately, as yet, we have not found a volunteer to take over some of these responsibilities.

But wait, there's more - as you often hear in TV ads. We are very aware that the newsletter is an extremely important part of our club. This is how we communicate and deliver the stories and histories of the programs and personalities of OTR to our membership. To this end we will be adding additional pages to each issue of the newsletter. This will allow our publisher, Carol Tiffany, the ability to have more print space per issue than before. In addition, Carol says an advantage will be that she will now be able to print the longer stories in one issue. Then too, we are also working with our printer to get the very tedious job of labeling, adding postage and mailing done by automation.

The net result is that we'll be reducing our costs and workload while still providing you one of the highest quality newsletters in the OTR community.

You can expect that the first couple of new issues may be "works in progress" as we strive to get it right. Normally, each bi-monthly newsletter will be published at the beginning of the period - early March for the Mar/Apr issue, etc.

I encourage you to write or email me to let me know your thoughts as our new regime unfolds.

The best of the new year to you all,

Larry

And, while you happen to be tuned in to this station, so to speak, I thought I would show you one way to fill some empty newsletter space.

Along with OTR, another hobby of mine is the collection and restoration of the radios that played all this wonderful programming. Here is a picture of my collection of radios that start from the 1920s.





1200'

TAPE	1862 ROMAN	NCE OF THE RANCHO
1L	11-05-41	Los Cerritos And Los Alamitos
	11-12-41	Tiburcio Basquez
2L	11-19-41	San Vincente y Santa Monica
	11-26-41	San Francisco
1R	12-03-41	San Antonio
	12-10-41	Benjamin D. Wilson - Part 1
2R	12-17-41	Benjamin D. Wilson - Part 2
	12-24-41	Christmas At San Gabriel

2L

1R

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TAP	E 1863 ROMA	ANCE OF THE RANCHOS	1200'
1L	12-31-41	San Jose de Buenos Ayres	
	01-07-42	Joseph Chapman	
2L	01-14-42	Azusa Dalton	
	01-21-42	Jedediah Smith	
1R	01-28-42	Rancho la Puente	
	02-04-42	Santa Catalina Island	
2R	02-11-42	Hugo Reid	
	02-18-42	La Ballona	
ТАР	F 1864 ROM	ANCE OF THE RANCHOS	1200'
1L	02-25-42	Juan Flaco	1200
123	03-07-42	Phineas Banning	
		č	
2L	03-15-42	Rancho San Francisquito	
	03-22-42	Water Development	
1R	03-29-42	Joaquin Murietta	
111	04-05-42	Rancho San Pasqual	
		•	
2R	04-12-42	Don Juan Temple	
	04-19-42	Rancho la Brea	
TAP	E 1865 ROMA	ANCE OF THE RANCHOS / MISCELLANEOUS SHOWS	1200'
1L	04-26-42	Pueblo Of Los Angeles	
	05-03-42	Transportation	
2L	05-10-42	The Carrillo Family	
21.1	03-10-42	MAKERS OF HISTORY: Declaration Of Independence	
		MAKERS OF HISTORY: War With Tripoli	
1R	06-29-49	DESTINATION FREEDOM: Harriet Tubman's Children	
	09-25-49	DESTINATION FREEDOM: A Garage In Gainesville	
2R	11-16-44	ONE NIGHT STAND: Woody Herman - 1 <sup>ST</sup> : I'm Gonna See My Baby [AFR	S #627]
	08-01-46	VIC AND SADE: L. Vogel Drum Visits	
CHO A NO	T 10// COOL	NATIONAL AND ADDRESS OF ADDRESS O	12001
1AP	1866 GOOI 09-08-38	NEWS OF 1939 Show #37: Guest: Norma Shearer in Marie Antoinette	1200'
1L	09-00-30	Show #37. Guest. Norma Shearer in Marie Antonieue	
2L	09-15-38	Show #38: Guest: Virginia Barrow	
IND. Comment			
1R	09-22-38	Show #39: Guest: Maxie Rosenbloom, Florence Rice	
2R	090-29-38	Show #40: Guest: Spencer Tracy	
211	070 27-30	one in it. Guesti openesi Truej	

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Ship To:			Date		
Address:					
City		State	_ Zip Code		
I do hereby agree to for monetary gain a	•	RHAC rules and agreen the tape on time.	ee not to sell or use li	brary materials	
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