



# RADIO REVIEW

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## *Paging Harpo Marx*

The Winter radio season is in full swing, and thus far has been marked by little that is new or startling.

To be sure, tap dancing is now a regular radio feature. The advertisers' demand for "names" has brought the dancing feet of Fred Astaire and Eleanor Powell to the microphone. On the stage or screen these artists stand alone in their field, but as their rhythmic taps come to us over the air we cannot join those who wax enthusiastic. It seems to us any good sound-effects man could imitate the sounds made by either, and unquestionably their singing could be surpassed by dozens of young men and women who have never gotten within hailing distance of a microphone, simply because they are not "names". With the current vogue for "big-timers" riding the airwaves, we await with breathless interest the news that Harpo Marx is coming to radio.

As for music, it is difficult to reconcile the advertisers' conception of what the audience wants to hear with the results of the radio poll just completed. According to popular vote, Sibelius and Beethoven head the list of favorite composers, indicating that the national audience demands the best in music. Isn't it

about time sponsors realized that those who enjoy the Philharmonic and the Boston Symphony Orchestras would applaud the same standard of music on a commercial program?

To E. R. Squibb and duPont must go the plaudits of grateful listeners for venturing off the beaten track. The actors on the Squibb programs have not been "names" but the dramatic sketches have been consistently entertaining nevertheless. The musical artists have been held to high artistic standards with no playing down to the so-called public taste. For its "Cavalcade" series, duPont has searched the history textbooks to find dramatic material and the result has been eminently satisfactory. Dignity and good taste have been evident throughout the presentations of both these sponsors and our correspondence indicates that the radio audience is properly appreciative.

Otherwise the same patterns continue. Some of the programs stand the test of time better than others, notably raconteurs, news commentators, variety hours, musical programs and "human interest" serials. Comedians seem to encounter the most difficulty in maintaining their hold on the public's affections, and of course, this is easy to explain. It is not simple to find entertaining material fifty-two weeks in the year, and the relentless microphone does not transmit pantomime or grimaces which might make stale jokes sound better.

Children's programs continue to be the weakest spots in the whole broadcasting system, with advertisers clinging tenaciously to the theory that only feverish and overexciting material will sell cereal and food drinks. The networks are at work on this problem and promise definite improvement soon, but thus far the results are reminiscent of the old tale of the laboring mountain and the mouse.

Most encouraging is the news that National Broadcasting Company will allocate more time on its networks for educational and cultural programs. We await further developments with interest.

The time may yet come when broadcasters, and not advertisers, will dictate radio policy. In their relations toward advertisers, the companies are still much too willing to make concessions. We'd like to see more spine displayed by the broadcasters in keeping their customers in line. Following this line of wishful

thinking, we can visualize the following scene taking place in the Sales Department of a big radio company:

PROSPECTIVE CUSTOMER: I'd like to have from seven to seven-thirty Sunday night for my show. (Editorial note: In the broadcasting business every program is a "show".)

RADIO EXECUTIVE: What kind of show have you in mind?

ADVERTISER: Light musical—master of ceremonies—orchestra—male quartet and a class contralto.

RADIO EXECUTIVE: Then there's only one spot you can have and that's between nine and nine-thirty. We need something light to follow the dramatic program from eight-thirty to nine, and to precede the forum which is on from nine-thirty to ten. Your show is just the thing. We can't sell you any other time on Sunday. And while we're discussing program, it must be understood that you will submit your list of musical selections in advance so that we are sure you do not include numbers which have been played on the daytime hours more than twice.

Since in this Utopian state we are discussing, all radio companies will be bound by an agreement to follow the same procedure, there will be no fear on the executive's part that the aggrieved customer will run to a rival company. He will sign on the dotted line, knowing that a balanced evening's entertainment will insure a wider listening audience for his "show" than would be possible on the old plan.

Yes, we're boldly advocating planned broadcasting, considered in terms of the whole morning, afternoon and evening, instead of the scrambled pattern which prevails at present. It may be a long way off—but won't it be wonderful when it comes?

## *Twisting the Dial—News and Comment*

There are ugly rumors that Alexander Woollcott's contract will not be renewed because his sponsor objects to Mr. Woollcott's liberal views on many current topics of interest. Say it isn't so, Cream of Wheat!

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If you like homespun philosophy, interspersed with humor, listen to Lum and Abner on the Blue Network some night. They seem to be among the most popular of the "jes' plain folks" type of program.

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Well, it seems we spoke too soon. Immediately after last month's REVIEW was off the press, a singing rooster appeared on Fred Allen's program as a contender for amateur honors. From now on we may expect almost anything in the way of barnyard pets. Only the mellowing influence of the approaching holiday season restrains us from withering comment about the exchange of jackasses!

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Every once in awhile we are reminded anew of radio's educational possibilities in the field of public health and safety. The program called "Motor Madness" presented by NBC on November 12th should be repeated once a week, we think, to impress reckless automobile drivers with the dangers of carelessness on the road.

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Found! a perfect description of the Voice of Experience program and its audience. This gem occurs in an article written by Clifton Fadiman in the October *Stage*. Mr. Fadiman speaks of the program as "... scrofulous matter ... clearly intended for goggle-eyed cretins only." In the same article, he describes with deadly accuracy most of the amateur hours heard on the networks and in comparison with Mr. Fadiman's delineation, our criticism in last month's REVIEW appears as devastating as the sigh of a canary.

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We hear some complimentary things now and then about Station WBT in Charlotte, N. C. Our correspondents point with particular pride to a novelty called, "Sing, It's Good for You." The inspiration for the singing, we gather, is the fun to be found in household tasks, all set to music. And while we're speaking of favorite features on local stations, our Chicago friends say that a news commentator named C. B. Gregory deserves special mention. The ladies in Milwaukee speak of Richard S. Davis, on WTMJ, as a raconteur who will go far. We've probably started something, singling out a few stations for praise, but if the correspondence from those localities means anything, they deserve it.



Smart boys, these agency script writers. One of them hit upon the brilliant idea of holding a contest for amateur radio announcers during the Ray Perkins program. The material read by the contestants consists solely of announcements about the virtues of Feenamint, after which the studio audience solemnly applauds. Of course no other material could possibly be found to test diction, voice production, microphone personality and other qualifications. Yes, it's fun to be fooled!

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The Ford Sunday night concerts could be considerably improved and their popularity increased with comparatively little effort. First of all, however, the program director will have to make up his mind whether he is trying to build a symphonic broadcast, or a musical melange. At present the program is difficult to judge by even ordinary musical standards. Certainly the Fred Waring broadcasts sponsored by Ford do satisfy the audience for light music as they are uniformly excellent. It is regrettable that the Sunday night series does not do the same for music-lovers who want to hear a high standard of serious music. The superb soloists who appear are frequently handicapped by an insufficiently rehearsed orchestra and the chorus detracts from, rather than adds to the enjoyment of the hour as it is not first class. The Detroit Symphony under Gabrilowitsch demonstrated it was capable of reaching musical heights never yet achieved in this Sunday night series.

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If you want to get acquainted with New York City's best after-dinner speakers, watch WMCA and the Inter-city chain. The most important testimonials, benefits and interesting events which occur in the vicinity of our fair city are broadcast by this station, through the enterprise of Dick Fishell. Mr. Fishell doubles in brass and also handles sports announcing for WMCA.

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We'd like to call especial attention to an entertaining series which encourages the creation of home-made music. "Music Is My Hobby," presented on Thursday evenings over NBC's Red Network, brings before the microphone men and women who are prominent in fields far removed from music, playing their favorite instruments. The listener is impressed with the joy these people seem to derive in performing for their own pleasure. Incidentally, one of the most amusing quips we have heard in some time may be credited to Mr. William T. Taylor, the banker, who was a recent guest on this series. When asked by the radio announcer how a busy banker could find time to sing, he replied, "My answer is the same I received a few years ago when I asked a friend who was studying music if she was intending to become a professional. She replied, 'No—I'm merely studying music for my own amazement!'"

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We are about to initiate a Forgive-Our-Bragging Department. Subscriptions for RADIO REVIEW have been received in the past two weeks from Australia, Japan and France.

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The old saying about imitation being the sincerest form of flattery comes to mind with the announcement that the National Association of Broadcasters has organized a committee to award prizes for the best radio programs. Hmm — — —sounds much like a "you-splash-me-and-I'll-splash-you" plan to us.

We thought the "holding-hands-with-you-alone" technique had been swept into discard when Your Lover went off the air; but it is being worked again on Ted Malone's "Between the Book Ends" program. Sounds very cheap to us. David Ross on CBS and Margery Graham on WGN have demonstrated that radio readers can have dignity and good taste and still command large followings.

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We hear that Buck Rogers is going off the air. This news will be greeted with great joy by mothers throughout the land. Now if "Og" and "Popeye" would join Buck, it would add considerably to their cup of joy, we are quite certain!

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Never have we heard such enthusiastic comments as is brought forth by the America's Town Meeting of the Air series. It seems everyone is talking about these programs, which provide vital, challenging material presented in most entertaining fashion. Having heard so many times that it is impossible to underestimate the radio audience's mental age—a statement with which we violently disagree—we are overjoyed to note the success of this series. If its response is any indication of a low mental age nationally, we are prepared to endorse N. T. G. and His Girls as an ideal children's program.

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It is not fair either to the radio audience or to the Boston Symphony to offer a one hour excerpt from its Saturday night program, and on some of the Western stations where the sample is further cut in half, the result is doubly unfortunate. The lack of program balance caused by picking up just part of the concert defeats the purpose of both NBC and the Boston Symphony in broadcasting this magnificent orchestra, which is to acquaint even the uneducated with the best in music. We do not have to go back very far in radio history to recall that it was not until the entire opera was offered weekly by Listerine that opera became popular as a radio feature. We hope NBC will make time to give us the whole Saturday night program, just as the country now enjoys the Philharmonic in its entirety on Sunday afternoons on CBS.

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Wallace Beery's mild, almost apologetic air as master of ceremonies on the Shell Chateau program is a welcome relief after Al Jolson. The super-enthusiastic, "oh, boy" attitude of some of the "give-the-little-girl-a-hand" school of m. c.'s should be confined to programs selling headache remedies. As for us, we'll take Wallace Beery.

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NBC's Radio Guild is conducting a Shakespearean "King" Cycle which we recommend for your attention. With commonplace serials publicized out of all proportion to their real merit, we feel we should be very remiss in failing to point out a series as fine as this.

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The "Cultivation of Taste" series on WIXAL, Boston, is something you should not miss if you have a short wave set. The subject is handled fascinatingly, at the same time demonstrating the practical value of good taste in everyday life.

## *Our Listening Groups Report*

. . . that they do not think Jack Benny's program is as entertaining this season as last, and that Jack sounds tired.

. . . that they like Dr. Hendrik Willem van Loon.

. . . that they do not think the daily March of Time programs are as interesting as the one weekly broadcast used to be.

. . . that they like Vivienne Segal's singing.

. . . that they consider WOR's "Love Doctor" a cheap program and can't understand why WOR wastes time on such trash.

. . . that they like the Baker, Beetle and Bottle combination, but wish Mr. Gulf didn't appear so frequently in the script.

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Most frequently complained about last month: The advertising on the Princess Pat program.

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In response to numerous requests, the Women's National Radio Committee issues its list of approved children's programs. We regret the list is not longer, but shall be pleased to add to it any new programs worthy of joining the small but select circle of those we can conscientiously recommend. They are listed in alphabetical sequence.

Alfred Terhune's Dog Stories—WOR—Mutual

Animal News Club—NBC

Captain Healy's Stamp Club—NBC

Junior Journal of the Air—NBC

\*The Puzzlers—WOR—Mutual

The Singing Lady—NBC

The Story Teller's House—WOR—Mutual

### *Educational Features*

American School of the Air—CBS

Cavalcade of America—CBS

Damrosch Music Appreciation Hour—NBC

Your English—NBC

\*For high school boys and girls.

We regret that the program entitled, "Great Moments in History," (NBC) is on the air too late to be included in this list.

## *New Programs in Review*

CHEVROLET. NBC Red Network. Saturday evening, 9:00 to 9:30 P.M. E. S. T.

A pleasing light musical program. Rubinoff plays his violin and conducts his orchestra in the manner his fans adore. Jan Peerce and Virginia Rae uphold the singing honors of the feature. This program, while new, seems to be a definite hit.

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JUMBO. NBC Red Network. Tuesday evening, 9:30 to 10:00 P.M. E.S.T.

The Jimmy Durante enthusiasts who have heretofore bemoaned the fact that radio does not do justice to Jimmy's personality may now breathe a sigh of relief. The Jumbo program gives him every opportunity to exploit the madcap comedy and unique brand of entertainment which only he possesses. There is no equivocating possible on the subject of Durante—you either think he is one of the world's greatest comics, or you can't understand what the other half sees in him. If you belong to the latter school, this program may help you understand his popularity. Donald Novis and Gloria Grafton sing acceptably, and Arthur Sinclair, a performer new to radio, is a welcome addition. This is the only novelty of the season in lighter programs, and we recommend it as such.

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LET'S TALK IT OVER. NBC Blue Network. Monday afternoon, 4:30 to 5:00 P.M. E.S.T.

At the time this is written there have been only two programs presented in this new series, but we have heard favorable comments about it from several sources. Undoubtedly, it's the success NBC has been groping for these many months. It is live, warm, and up-to-the-minute. Emily Post, Anne Hard and Alma Kitchell will be featured regularly. We understand Margaret Cuthbert has had a finger in this pie, and if so, we congratulate both Miss Cuthbert and NBC on the result.

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CORN COB PIPE CLUB. NBC Red Network. Saturday evening, 10:30 to 11:00 P.M. E.S.T.

We can't understand this program as a network presentation at all. It sounds more like the sort of half hour which one might expect to hear on a five-watt station. As a matter of fact, when our attention was called to it by some of our friends, we thought it was a satire to end all hillbilly "folksy" presentations, but apparently, we were wrong and the sponsor is in dead earnest. All we can say is that the intelligent men of our acquaintance who smoke pipes would tune this program out instantly, so it should not be regarded as typical of the entertainment enjoyed by pipe smokers.

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