



# RADIO REVIEW

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## *Stepchildren of Radio*

We have been going into the matter of children's programs rather thoroughly and have compiled some interesting material. We find, for instance, that of all the features which clutter up the airwaves on the late afternoon hours, only thirteen bear the unqualified stamp of approval of parents and children alike. Nine of these are sustaining features which means that in this branch of broadcasting as in all others we are indebted to broadcasters themselves for the best things on the air. The roll of honor is listed on another page and those who are interested will observe that three of the four sponsored programs are long-time successes, and that not one on the list is highly sensational or exciting. In the final analysis blood-and-thunder is not on top.

We have also made a study of the complaints concerning children's programs and note that most of the ones which are not wholly approved fall into one or another of the following classifications:

Too much material and action crammed into fifteen minutes, causing program to be paced too swiftly; characters speak

too quickly creating a staccato effect; program leaves junior audience in a state of anxiety about the fate of one of the characters; program too noisy; too many characters introduced making it difficult to follow plot; program purports to be story of an everyday boy but situations are far-fetched and would never occur in life; voices of actors irritating; program encourages use of poor English; story is silly and presumes upon intelligence of listeners.

Of the approved programs several are "one-man" presentations. All are paced at a moderate tempo and not one gives the impression of having in the background a program director who is frantically signalling the cast to "hurry! hurry!"

This is also true of the most successful serials on the air. "Forever Young", "One Man's Family", "Vic and Sade" and "Today's Children" all seem to move along smoothly and without effort. There is no striving for effect, no hectic atmosphere, no abnormal situations and never are there more than two actors before the microphone for any length of time. The people heard are warm, likable human beings who seem to have the same problems most of us have. They actually take the time to think now and then before making a reply, nor do they speak only pearls of wisdom. In short, life as it is for the average family is reflected in these stories and therein lies the secret of their popularity.

We learned that these programs are tremendously popular with children as well as adults. Why then, we wondered, would it not be a good idea to adapt the "real-life" formula to wholesome material for children? The answer to this proved to be enlightening.

The average radio advertiser, it seems, is not a bit interested in presenting a program which parents will approve. He wants to win the children and makes a deliberate attempt to select something which is "sure-fire" even though it may be objectionable to parents. A comic strip program or material which contains all the elements to which parents bitterly object is preferable, and writers of fine manuscripts have about one chance in a hundred of selling them. We have read countless stories which have gone the rounds of advertising agencies and have been rejected because they were "too good", astonishing as that may seem!

Having obtained a serial which answers his requirements, Mr. Advertiser proceeds to lure young audiences with bait. Every experienced writer knows his manuscript must include what is known in the trade as the "merchandising tie-up." This, in plain English, is any plan which will bring box-tops, labels or wrappers to the radio studios in exchange for some prize. Secret codes, club memberships, pins, badges and other gadgets are available for the nice little boy who will nag his mother into purchasing the required number of loaves of bread, boxes of cereal or cans of food drink. Until the listening habit is well-established, the sponsor does not risk having the program stand or fall on its own merits.

The remedy for the situation is clear, since this device is employed to a greater extent on bad programs than on good ones. The latter do not require this questionable practice to win goodwill and the former should not be encouraged in this way. If women, the buyers of the family, will refuse to be exploited through their children and will not permit them to send away for the prizes offered, an appraisal of programs on the late afternoon hours next year may tell a different story.

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### *Twisting the Dial—News and Comment*

Ralston's would be delighted, no doubt, to know that in the Borough of Queens, New York City, a few weeks ago boys were canvassing from house to house for package tops. The idea, it seems, was for several to pool their spoils to see if the result of this united effort would not win a hundred dollar check for "the gang." We'd love to know if one of the Tom Mix checks went to Jackson Heights. Won't someone tell us?

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Our idea of nothing at all in stunt programs is the Bock Goat Beauty Contest which was described on CBS. The silly season in radio has begun.

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Someone whose musical judgment we respect very highly tells us that the Seven G's, heard on the Phil Baker program is the finest vocal ensemble on the air. Too bad they are not given more to do during the half hour.

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The women of Oklahoma City want to know why "The Singing Lady" is not heard over their stations although "impossible programs" broadcast from New York and Chicago are. What should we tell them, Kellogg's?

The American School of the Air gets better and better every year. The dramatizations presented daily and particularly Dorothy Gordon's delightful music every Thursday are well-liked. Mr. Paley may well be proud of this feature.

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The Chesterfield program has slipped in recent months and especially the last few weeks. The orchestra becomes noisier with every broadcast and Rosa Ponselle is a disappointment as a radio artist. Her voice has a constant vibration which is annoying, and true to the tradition of opera singers who have preceded her to the microphone, she sings selections for which her voice is not suited. The result is unfortunate. The brightest spot on the half hour is David Ross and the modest, convincing commercial credits.

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Dorothy Thompson is a welcome addition to the program conducted by Claudine Macdonald. We'd like to hear her every week instead of twice a month.

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We could hardly believe our eyes when we read that Beatrice Fairfax is going to give advice to the lovelorn on the Columbia network. Between The Voice of Experience and this new feature CBS seems to be cornering the market on silly women who like to have their love affairs solved confidentially with an audience of only a few million people.

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Pierre Coleman's "A Dog and His Boy" is as different as the title would indicate. It is on Station WINS every Saturday morning and will probably be on a network one of these days. Judging from the few broadcasts we have heard it should be.

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The most popular woman on the air today, bar none, is Martha Deane, despite the fact that there are sections of the country which do not even get a chance to hear her. Her assistant, Vincent Connolly, is always mentioned by the Deane enthusiasts, too. Nice team work on that program. We think its popularity is based on its naturalness and sincerity. The listeners get the impression that Miss Deane is speaking to them just as she would if she were holding a personal conversation with each across a tea table. Maybe it's our imagination but we think WOR has an intimate atmosphere anyway.

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We are glad to note that the Ford Sunday night concerts have been steadily improving. Particularly outstanding was the program on March 15th.

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"The Magic of Speech" is another feature on a long list of sustainers for which NBC should be heartily commended. The dramas staged by Vida Sutton to put over her points are entertaining as well as educational.

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"Forever Young," a charming serial, has the dubious honor of having the most nerve-racking commercial credits on the air at present. Not even Lady Esther



at her loquacious worst in the days before CBS brought relief to suffering thousands was any more annoying. The drip-water method of torturing prisoners used in some countries is evidently the inspiration for Camay's advertising.

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When oh when is Hendrik Willem van Loon coming back on the air? We miss him sorely.

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Our friends in Birmingham, Ala. tell us that the Industrial High School Chorus heard over WBRC at 10:30 A.M. Fridays should be on a network. Adrew W. Smith, Radio Editor of the *News-Age-Herald* says, "Lawrence Tibbett wrote he received the greatest musical thrill of his life listening to the Negro children sing."

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You could have knocked us over with a microbe when we heard this gem on a recent "Echoes of the Past" program. The story was about Ponce de Leon and all went well until someone shouted, "Here comes the boat now, Ponce de Leon. See the puff of smoke and hear the whistle blow!"—and lo! came the mournful note of a steamboat whistle across the airwaves. We expected at any minute to hear Ponce, the old anachronist, break into "The Robert E. Lee."

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The Tom Broadhurst Stories on CBS every Saturday have the tang of the sea about them. His stories are thrilling enough to hold the interest of children yet they do not antagonize parents. If you are acquainted with the Broadhurst books for boys you will want your children to hear him on the radio. Men like this program, too.

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At the time WNRC was first constituted, a representative of an advertising agency told one of its executives that "it is impossible to underestimate the intelligence of the radio audience." Apparently this continues to be the viewpoint of some agencies judging by the commercials on the Lucky Strike program. "Lucky Strike is not a cure-all but . . ." and similar statements are too ridiculous for words. Is Lucky Strike trying to compete with Peruna?

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Our favorite reporter is a man who writes us in clear-cut terms about the things on the air which displease him most. A recent criticism is one with which we agree so heartily that we are going to quote him verbatim: "One reason for dissatisfaction, I believe, is the trend toward short programs. It's fifteen minutes of this and fifteen minutes of that, and more than the physical inconvenience of changing the dial continually is the necessity of transferring your mental interest from the Romance of Helen Boop to the cowboy songs of a Bronx hillbilly, and then to something else again." Thank you, Mr. New Haven.

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We think it is high time to retire some of the standard works which have been heard all season, such as Liszt's "Second Hungarian Rhapsody" or "Les Preludes." Haven't our foremost conductors ever heard of his "Tasso"? And

why is Chausson's "Symphony" or his beautiful tone poem, "Viviane" completely ignored? Pianists, too, fall into the same musical ruts. Even Hoffman on his recent appearance did not venture off the beaten path but played the familiar "Moonlight Sonata" and two Chopin selections every radio pianist does. This situation is also true of lighter music. "Erminie" and "Fra Diavolo" are buried in camphor balls while "Vienna Woods" and "Blue Danube" are heard all too frequently. More imagination in planning programs is required, it seems to us.

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We wonder if Chase and Sanborn are collecting a commission from Major Bowes for the use of their radio hour to boost his interests? First it was the road units and now it is the new magazine. Pretty generous of C. and S. This is the program, you will recall, which started out by presenting amateurs and wound up as a School for Salesmen.

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## *Our Listening Groups Report*

- . . . that they like Lum 'n' Abner.
  - . . . that those Sunday afternoon University of Chicago Round Tables are excellent.
  - . . . that they still think the Jello commercials are the cleverest on the air.
  - . . . that they think those Sidewalk Interviewers, Belcher and Johnson, very amusing.
  - . . . that they like Richard Himber's music.
  - . . . that Kate Smith is as popular as ever.
  - . . . that the Town Hall of the Air is doing more to educate people concerning current issues than any other program on the air.
  - . . . that they enjoyed the Cities' Service tenth anniversary program.
  - . . . that they are glad the Goldbergs are back.
- Most frequently complained about last month: The much overdone "Salute to Cities" idea. Everyone knows the telegrams and enthusiastic messages are not as spontaneous as they appear to be.
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## *New Programs in Review*

**ZIEGFELD FOLLIES OF THE AIR.** Sponsored. WABC-Columbia Network. 8:00-9:00 P.M. E.S.T. Saturday.

A good hour of entertainment with a little bit of everything thrown in. Fannie Brice's comedy, Al Goodman's orchestra, vocalists singly and in duets and the glamour of a musical comedy of the stage are brought to you over the microphone. The girls who act as heralds do not improve the program any, as the effect of the blended voices is that of a single person speaking in a room with poor acoustics. The commercials are actually silly and unconvincing. The announcer sounds as if he had just discovered soap, which gives you a faint idea.

**WILDERNESS ROAD.** Sustaining. WABC-Columbia Network. 5:15-5:30 P.M. E.S.T. Monday through Friday.

Here is an excellent children's program which deserves the applause of everyone who is interested in entertainment for young people. It is an historical drama well-written, cleverly staged and with a splendid cast. It is an ideal serial for children but adults

will enjoy it, too. As soon as the children have had a chance to get acquainted with it they'll love it. If advertisers are interested in a demonstration of a program which has adventure, excitement and dramatic suspense and nevertheless is not objectionable, we advise them to tune in to WILDERNESS ROAD. We rate it 100%.

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CELEBRITY NIGHT. Sponsored. NBC-Red Network. 10:30-11:00 P.M. E.S.T. Saturday.

A light musical program featuring George Olsen and Ethel Shutta. Miss Shutta sings comedy songs as few others on the air can, and George Olsen's music is always pleasant. The guest star idea (for a change!) is employed and gives promise of a note of variety every week. After hearing the commercials on some toothpaste programs it is rather a shock to discover toothbrushes have anything to do with gleaming teeth but the idea is thoroughly rammed down one's throat on this program. Another case of a lost opportunity to win goodwill by restraint in advertising—but then we fear sponsors will never learn.

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## APPROVED CHILDREN'S PROGRAMS

(Network presentations)

AMERICAN SCHOOL OF THE AIR. 2:30 P.M. CBS Network. Monday through Friday.

ANIMAL CLOSE-UPS. 6:15 P.M. WJZ-Blue Network. Tuesday and Thursday.

ANIMAL NEWS CLUB. 6:00 P.M. WJZ-Blue Network. Wednesday and Friday.

\*BILLY AND BETTY. 6:45 P.M. WEA-Red Network. Monday through Friday.

\*CAPTAIN TIM HEALY. 7:15 P.M. WJZ-Blue Network. Monday, Wednesday and Friday.

DAMOSCH APPRECIATION HOUR. 11:00-12:00 A.M. Red and Blue Networks. Friday.

JUNIOR RADIO JOURNAL. 5:15 P.M. WJZ-Blue Network. Monday.

\*SINGING LADY. 5:30 P.M. WJZ-Blue Network. Monday through Friday.

SPARE RIBS. 8:00 A.M. WEA-Red Network. Monday through Saturday.

\*STANDARD SCHOOL BROADCAST. 11:00-11:45 A.M. Pacific Coast Time. NBC stations KFSD, KFI, KPO, KGW, KOMO, and KHQ. Thursday.

STORY TELLER'S HOUSE. Tuesday, 3:45 P.M. WOR-Mutual. Saturday, 9:45 A.M.

TOM BROADHURST'S SEA STORIES. 5:15 P.M. CBS Network. Saturday.

WILDERNESS ROAD. 5:15 P.M. CBS Network. Monday through Friday.

\*Sponsored programs. All EST unless otherwise indicated.

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