

BELIEVE IT OR NOT RIPLEY • NBC'S SONG SLEUTHS • CAN AI REMOVE THE SWEAT FROM RE-CREATIONS?



Volume 46 • Number 11

FEBRUARY 2023

A high-contrast, black and white silhouette of a person's head and shoulders, facing right. The person is wearing a chef's hat. In the foreground, two vintage microphones are visible, one of which has a "BLUE" label.

Unmasking
the
Mystery Chef



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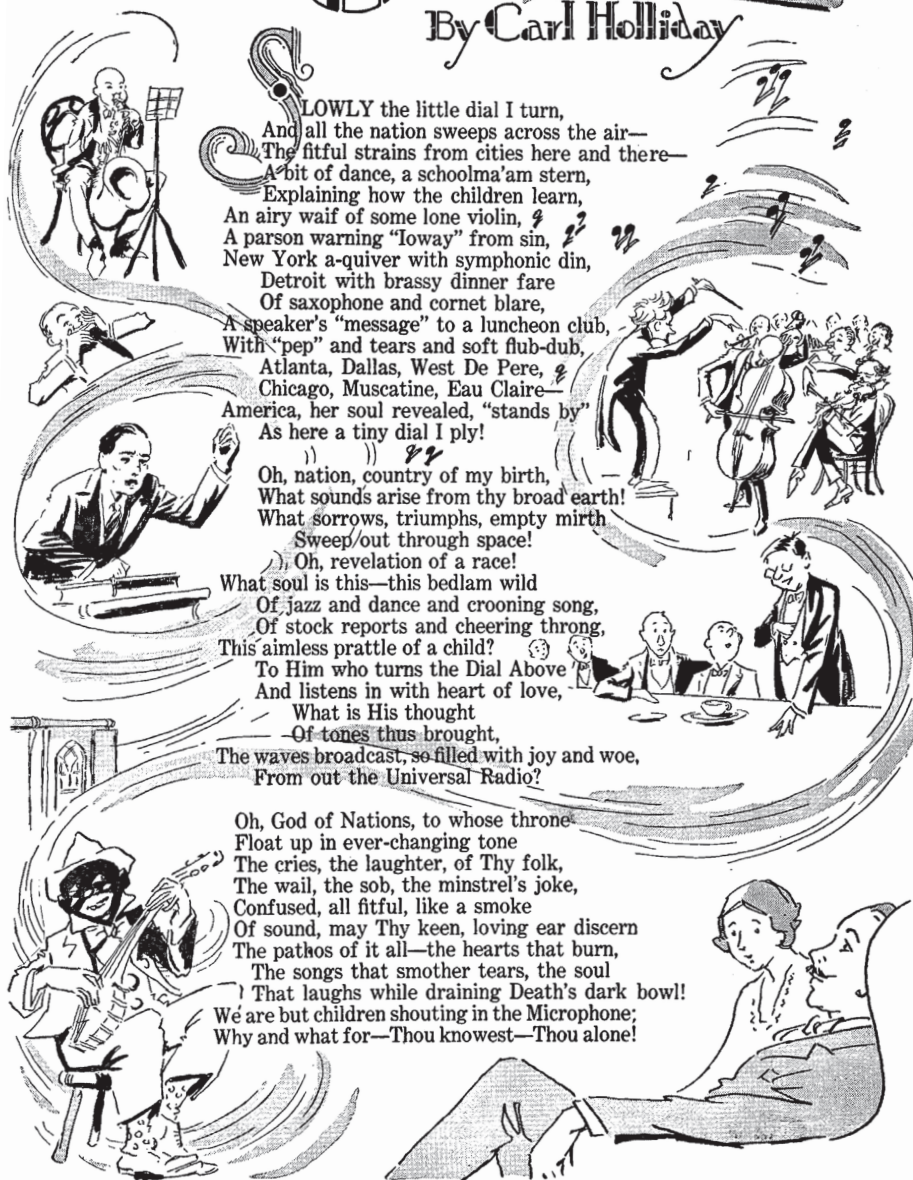


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I Turn The Radio Dial

By Carl Holliday



LOWLY the little dial I turn,
And all the nation sweeps across the air—
The fitful strains from cities here and there—
A bit of dance, a schoolma'am stern,
Explaining how the children learn,
An airy waif of some lone violin, ♪ ♪
A parson warning "Toway" from sin,
New York a-quiver with symphonic din,
Detroit with brassy dinner fare
Of saxophone and cornet blare,
A speaker's "message" to a luncheon club,
With "pep" and tears and soft flub-dub,
Atlanta, Dallas, West De Pere, ♪
Chicago, Muscatine, Eau Claire—
America, her soul revealed, "stands by"
As here a tiny dial I ply!

Oh, nation, country of my birth,
What sounds arise from thy broad earth!
What sorrows, triumphs, empty mirth
Sweep out through space!

Oh, revelation of a race!
What soul is this—this bedlam wild
Of jazz and dance and crooning song,
Of stock reports and cheering throng,
This aimless prattle of a child?
To Him who turns the Dial Above
And listens in with heart of love,
What is His thought
Of tones thus brought,
The waves broadcast, so filled with joy and woe,
From out the Universal Radio?

Oh, God of Nations, to whose throne
Float up in ever-changing tone
The cries, the laughter, of Thy folk,
The wail, the sob, the minstrel's joke,
Confused, all fitful, like a smoke
Of sound, may Thy keen, loving ear discern
The pathos of it all—the hearts that burn,
The songs that smother tears, the soul
That laughs while draining Death's dark bowl!
We are but children shouting in the Microphone;
Why and what for—Thou knowest—Thou alone!



It's election time at SPERDVAC and so the president's column is deferred until next month. In the column's stead we bring you some old-time radio culture in the form of a poem and its accompanying illustration. "I Turn the Radio Dial" by Carl Holliday was first published in the May 1930 edition of *What's on the Air: The Magazine for the Radio Listener*, a short-lived publication that offered detailed information about locating radio stations in the ether in addition to short commentaries about radio's content. Among the commentaries were biographies of early radio stars, production backgrounds, and many reviews of the vaudeville careers of the radio comedy stars.

Believe it or Not— Ripley



ONE OF THE
50 MILLION
'UNTOUCHABLES'

THE BRIDE
AGE 7 YEARS
HER HUSBAND
WAS ONLY 9



THE SACRED BULL
OF BENARES

DEVOUT HINDUS PUT
BLANKETS OVER HIM
TO KEEP HIM WARM
IN WINTER—AND POUR
WATER OVER HIM TO
KEEP HIM COOL IN
SUMMER.



PILGRIMS
TO THE
HOLY CITY



COLONIAL BEACONLIGHTS FEATURE R. L. RIPLEY.

FAME as a cartoonist came slowly to Robert L. Ripley. He drew many cartoons for the sport pages of the New York *Globe* before he finally struck the "Believe It or Not" gold-mine that is netting him a good-sized fortune.

But fame as a radio entertainer came overnight to Broadcaster Ripley when he stepped before the "mike" just two months ago and gave his first of a series of entertainments for the Colonial Beacon Oil Company of Boston, Mass. Hardly had the program started when telegrams of congratulation began to pour in. Letters followed the telegrams and have been coming in a steady stream ever since.

The program itself is entirely different from any other on the air. During his travels, Ripley has unearthed many musical "Believe It or Nots." For instance, the curious fact that Lohengrin's wedding march is essentially the same as Chopin's funeral march; that the melodies of "America" and "The Star-Spangled Banner" both come from European drinking-

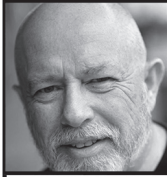
songs; that a man once wrote his will to music, and another tattooed a song upon his chest. "Curioddities" such as these give spice to even this most dramatic of programs.

The Beacon Colonials, a specially selected orchestra, furnishes the musical interpretation of these strange oddities, and illustrates each point that Ripley makes.

Ed Whitney, a veteran performer, takes the part of Ed Merrill, keeper of the Colonial Beaconlight. Alwyn Bach, famed WEAf announcer, accompanies Ripley each Monday night to the Colonial Station, where a riddle and many "queeriosities" are given weekly.

Robert L. "Believe It or Not" Ripley, now broadcasting during the Colonial Beaconlights radio entertainment each Monday night, had his earlier auditions recorded on phonograph records, then listened to them so as to correct any imperfections in his voice or word inflection. As the programs have improved, the method must have been a success.

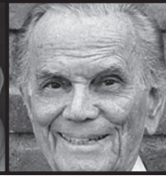
SAM MALCOM LEVY.



Larry Albert



Jim Beaver



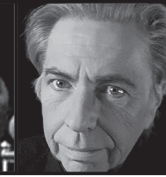
Tommy Cook



Ivan Cury



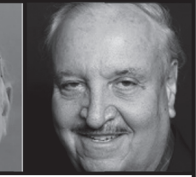
Yve Evans



Ed French



Bryan Hendrickson



John Jensen



Melinda Peterson



Camden Singer



Beverly Washburn

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for the International Jack Benny Fan Club
2023 Virtual Convention**



Phil Proctor



Stuffy Singer



Brad Zinn

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Ivan Cury • Yve Evans • Ed French • Bryan Hendrickson
John Jensen • Melinda Peterson • Phil Proctor
Camden Singer • Stuffy Singer
Beverly Washburn • Brad Zinn**



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THE BIG SHOW
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WANT IT! JUST
"DIAL"
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ANNOUNCING...

our brand new SPERDVAC INTERNET RADIO STATION! To access the station go to www.sperdvac.com.

SPERDVAC Board Member Corey Harker has been working in secret for months building out a server on which to host an Internet radio station that will feature shows from SPERDVAC's carefully cultivated library of disk transfers, as well as audio from recreations, panels and interviews from SPERDVAC's rich history of hosting some of the greatest luminaries of classic radio.

The launch of SPERDVAC RADIO is part of the Board of Directors' efforts to reach the most possible members with each activity. These efforts include hosting our monthly Zoom interviews on SPERDVAC Coast-to-Coast, scanning and uploading our library of scripts to sperdvac.com as well as adding streaming audio to the site.

SPERDVAC RADIO will feature (42) blocks of programming (6) hours long, which will rotate throughout the month so no matter your schedule, you'll be able to tune in to your favorites.

This is our trial for the new station so we're wide open for suggestions on what would make it the most valuable to you. Please check out the new station as part of your holiday listening and let us know what you think!

Happy Listening!



sperdvac.com



NBC SONG SLEUTHS

In the 1940s plagiarists were supplying music to radio stations. In an effort to snatch the song snatchers, NBC created a group of song sleuths

Coville Archives

PR-27

from: **NBC PRESS
DEPARTMENT
NEW YORK**

EXCLUSIVE IN YOUR CITY
February 19, 1943

RADIO MUSIC CLINIC TRAPS SNITCHED TUNES

America's F.B.I. and England's Scotland Yard--expert as they are at tracking down misdeeds and the culprits responsible for them--can learn a thing or two from the enterprising corps of Radio City sleuths who are ever on the alert to espy music plagiarists. City sleuths who are ever on the alert to espy music plagiarists.

Five men in the NBC music library division are, perhaps, the world's outstanding experts at detecting snatched sonatas, appropriated arias, raided rhapsodies and lifted lullabies. Their sole tools of detection are keen eyes and ears--and most important of all--good memories. Their record at uncovering plagiarized tunes is amazing; the song snatchers find soon enough that NBC's tune Hawk-shaws are infallible and they either mend their ways or jump off a cliff.

In the effort to prevent the network use of new works containing lifted bits of other compositions, the song sleuths are on the job night and day. An average of 100,000 tunes a month pass through their offices. To be more accurate, only the "free and clear" ones pass; those containing plagiarized snatches bounced right back to the composer with the notations of possible copyright violations.

No Sherlock Holmes hat, magnifying glass and calabash pipe are essential for tune detecting at NBC. The only Baker Street prod the tune spies employ is a needle--a phonograph needle to play back recordings of some suspected violating compositions.

In most cases, though, the song sleuths don't have to go beyond a reading of the work to adjudge its "purity." The eye serves

(more)

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ragtime observations. Freddy is also an old hand at uncovering lifts from musical comedy, operetta and classical tunes. Richard Bannier is the man who scans standard works, overtures and all folk music. Ernest La Prade, director of music research, covers symphonies, chamber music and--for variety--hillbilly tunes.

"They shall not pass," is the motto of this music espionage crew. While each man works independently in his stalking of plagiarists, occasionally a "tough nut" pops up that calls for a conference. Then, with all the experts in a huddle, the familiar tunes are tracked down to their source of origin.

In an "original" opera submitted to the department for clearance, Belviso and his aides uncovered 175 "clear-cut" instances of plagiarism. This was the record number of offenses uncovered in a single work.

The NBC operatives point out that it is not always the unknown composer who is guilty of plagiarism. In many instances, the well-known songsmith is guilty of the same offense.

There are a great number of borderline cases, where the song-snatching is not distinct enough to be formally charged against the composer, but still close enough to another tune to raise a question of possible legal snares. These borderline cases call for professional counsel and the matter is referred to the NBC legal department's own music expert, Robert P. Myers.

All divisions of NBC forward their music suggestions to New York for official clearance. But the out-of-town NBC offices maintain their own vigilance against plagiarism, too. And the experience of one would-be plagiarist proves it!

(more)

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as well as ear to the tune operatives who can tell almost instantly whether the work was lifted from any previous composition.

The music library division has a great number of tasks and functions over a much wider range than its name alone implies. Aside from the library itself the biggest working music library in the world--the staff checks copyrights, performance rights and handles the assignment of special radio compositions.

Necessity to guard against the use of a plagiarized score is obvious. The network must avoid any possible litigation over the unauthorized performance of any bit of music. And the best way to avoid legal clash is to bar any questionable manuscript.

Thomas H. Belviso, manager of the music library division, heads the staff of tune-probing experts. His wide experience as a musician, conductor and composer has acquainted him with the entire musical sphere and he has spotted many examples of plagiarism at a single glance. He holds that in 99 cases out of 100, the plagiarism is unintentional.

"A composer might have heard a work years ago; the combination of notes would recur to him and he would set them down as his very own, frequently sincere in the opinion that the score is his own creation. But, when the similar scores were pointed out, virtually every composer we challenged readily agreed that we were correct in our observations."

Song sleuthing, like other professions, is a field for specialization. And the NBC music staff has its own specialists. Randolph Ketchum is the "pop" expert; his superiors say he knows every popular song that has come off the presses in the past 15 years. Freddy Weper is the super-sleuth called in for old-time ballad and

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One day, Belviso heard a familiar tune being played on one of his staff expert's pianos. He recognized it immediately as a theme song he wrote for the old "Warden Laves" radio series. But the strange part of this playing was that the tune was submitted for clearance for a Chicago dramatic program. Time was at a premium and Belviso, instead of taking the Chicago songwriter to task for lifting his work, granted permission to use the score; it was obvious that inasmuch as the tune originated with himself, there could be no other possible objections.

But, listening in, Belviso was surprised to discover the tune was omitted. A wire from a Chicago program executive explained the action: "The tune was stolen from Belviso, so we yanked it out."

The NBC intelligence men mentioned that a great number of "new" songs that seem familiar to listeners are actually the works of the same composers. However, when a composer lifts from his own works, there is no possibility of legal clash unless the two similar tunes are owned by different publishers. But, technically, the experts point out, there is more "similarity in style" in the works of single composers rather than outright copying. And this situation, they add, was even true of the great masters who would continually borrow from their own past scores.

Memory is the best weapon the NBC song sleuths have. And they have proved time and time again, through their constant vigilance, that "Crime doesn't pay!"

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sk



Unmasking the Mystery Chef

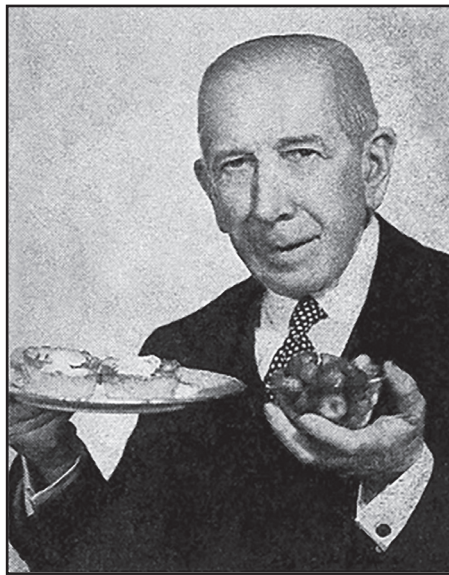
by Gary Coville

HIS RADIO PROGRAMS, BOOKS AND CULINARY ADVICE helped guide America's cooks through the Great Depression and the throes of wartime rationing. His name was John MacPherson, but radio listeners simply knew him as the Mystery Chef, his nom de plume and the name of his radio show. MacPherson possessed an engaging personality and was a master showman. He managed to capture the attention of audiences for a quarter century. Very few recordings of his radio work have survived, a fact that only adds to the aura of charm, mystery and elusiveness that John MacPherson cultivated during his public years.

Separating fact from creative publicity when it comes MacPherson's background is a challenge. Biographical details appear to change sometimes with the telling. His backstory, before becoming the Mystery Chef, is far from humdrum. As provided by MacPherson, it is a story that mirrored the communal experience of the Depression Era, a story of loss and the struggle for recovery which audiences then could appreciate. Parts of this story remains unverifiable, but his public success was unquestionably genuine.

John seems to have been born in Scotland in 1877 to a prominent family. In 1906, as he told it, he set sail from England for America. His father was engaged in advertising and financed his son's trip to the States to study American advertising methods. John assumed something of a lavish lifestyle and there was

a falling out between father and son. MacPherson subsequently took up residence in a boarding house where the meals were unpalatable. Consequently, he started doing his own cooking and began a life-long practice of collecting and creating recipes.



MacPherson billed himself as the Mystery Chef, a billing that would heighten MacPherson's character.

He married and staked out a reasonably successful career in advertising. However, as MacPherson explained to Robert Peterson, for Peterson's *Life Begins at Forty* column (April 9, 1958), everything began to fall apart as he entered his early 50s. There were financial problems. MacPherson and his wife, Peggy, each fell ill; John was diagnosed with cancer and underwent a couple of surgeries. When he was able to work again, he was 53-years-old, and no one wanted to hire him. It was 1930 and the Depression was underway.

If MacPherson's old profession was now closed to him, he would need to find a new vocation and soon; he was \$30,000 in debt. The one thing he could do well was cook. He had always prepared all the meals for himself and Peggy. He had amassed thousands of recipes and was capable of rhapsodizing endlessly about both the science and romance of food. MacPherson contacted the president of the Davis Baking Company and pitched the idea of a cooking show that would allow John to offer tasty, economical recipes to radio listeners. Davis Baking Powder, of course, would be featured prominently whenever possible.

MacPherson billed himself as the Mystery Chef, a billing that would heighten MacPherson's character. The usual explanation given by

◀ **ORIGINAL CAPTION:** "The Mystery Chef," cooking expert of the BLUE network, whose advice to women helps solve many of the problems occasioned by food rationing. There will be plenty of food available, he says, if the housewife will adopt "rational rationing" methods of planning her meals. **ABOVE:** The Mystery Chef exposed as John MacPherson in publicity photo for *The Mystery Chef* television program.

John for broadcasting cloaked in mystery rather than appearing under his own name was to spare the sensibilities of his mother. Supposedly, his Scottish mother would have been embarrassed if her son were to be associated with performing woman's work in a kitchen. Indeed, whenever an image of the Mystery Chef would appear in print the Chef's face would be hidden by a mask or otherwise obscured by a hat or glove or some other item strategically held to disguise the face. The charade would become part of the Mystery Chef's signature.

The Davis Company bought the idea, and the *Davis Mystery Chef* (as the program was initially called) found a home over Massachusetts stations WBZ-WBZA, Springfield and Boston. Launching on May 7, 1930,



THE WORLD'S OUTSTANDING COOKING EXPERT!
"A FEATURE WITH THESE FEATURES"

PUBLIC SERVICE!

Today's biggest problem is FOOD, which THE MYSTERY CHEF helps to solve with recipes that require few points and ingredients readily available. Recipes are given in so simple a manner that even a child of 12 can cook like an expert.

MERCHANDISING!

At very low cost sponsor can offer MYSTERY CHEF Recipes. 1000 people a day calling for recipes at the John Shillito Co., Cincinnati's largest Department Store. 4500 a day at retail outlets of Van de Kamp's Holland Dutch Bakers, Seattle.

SUCCESS!

15 years on the Networks.

POPULARITY!

7 million American homes use MYSTERY CHEF recipes by their personal requests.

ONE OF RADIO'S BEST SALESMEN—THE MYSTERY CHEF CAN DO A LONG WEARING JOB FOR JUST ABOUT ANY PRODUCT USED IN THE HOME—3 to 5 transcribed quarter hours per week now available. Write or wire

Harry S. Goodman
 19 EAST 53rd STREET at Madison Avenue...NEW YORK CITY

The Mystery Chef available on transcription in 1943 by the Harry S. Goodman organization

The Mystery Chef quickly captured a loyal listening audience. By the following year, the series was being broadcast nationally by NBC and MacPherson was well on his way toward remedying his financial difficulties. *Variety* (February 28, 1933) in assessing the program focused primarily on the man behind the figurative apron. "This chap features a cultured, clipped-tone style of talking with a dash of personality," *Variety* wrote. "He suggests a young man who might be a 'class' announcer or the graduate of a better-grade university. The Chef talks, or reads, rapidly though clearly. Voice is easy on the ear and he uses the first person pronoun frequently."

The Mystery Chef would remain a fixture on radio for more than 20-years, airing on different networks and various stations. He continued to insist his identity needed to remain shrouded in mystery to protect his mother from social embarrassment; after all, preparing food was something done by the servant class. Nonetheless, the Mystery Chef's identity became known early in his radio career and clearly with MacPherson's blessing and orchestration. His name may not have been uttered over the airwaves, but the print media was clearly a different matter.

By 1933, the Mystery Chef's popularity had grown to the extent that he was hired as an occasional columnist for the recently launched fan magazine, *Radio Stars*. His column, "The Mystery Chef Speaks For Himself," first appeared in the August 1933 issue. Although the Chef never used his real name in the column, *Radio Stars* had already unmasked John in April 1933, naming MacPherson in a lengthy pictorial piece titled "Revealing the Mystery Chef." Written under the byline of Cecil B. Sturges, the article provided some background details which clearly must have been provided by the Mystery Chef himself. In London, according to this story, as a young man, MacPherson had been a highly successful advertising executive. Implying a connection to the aristocratic MacPherson clan, the article included a purported photo of John as a young man costumed in an elaborate dress parade uniform for which MacPherson had allegedly won first prize in a contest held by the King of England. There was also an impressive photo of his family's palatial home and a photo of the Chef's New York apartment. In June, a photo of the Mystery Chef's wife, clearly identified as Mrs. John MacPherson, was published in *Radio Stars*. All of this revelatory activity presaged the Mystery Chef's

debut as a columnist in August.

The Mystery Chef's first major publishing effort, *The Mystery Chef's Own Cookbook*, was released to bookstores in 1936. The publisher, Longmans, Green and Company, offered a somewhat different account of how the Mystery Chef came into existence. The dustjacket blurb asserted the Chef, a successful businessman with an expertise in chemical education, one day found himself helping out a friend by filling in on a radio show. The businessman spoke about his hobby of cookery in such fascinating terms that the station received literally thousands of letters wanting to hear more from the speaker. A food company (Davis Baking Powder) offered to sponsor the idea and suddenly the *Mystery Chef* emerged from the ether.

A newspaper story by Ruth Arell, appearing in the *Atlantic Constitution* (November 11, 1936), wove yet another account. Arell paints a picture of a bon vivant and yachtsman who once caught his cook wiping a knife on the cook's greasy breeches. The future Mystery Chef then and there decided he would do his own cooking going forward. When the Depression left him penniless, the man decided to audition for radio. Several other hopefuls attended the same audition. Each applicant was asked to audition under a non-de-plume. On a whim, the man selected "Mystery Chef" as his identity. This was essentially an embellishment of the same tale told in a United Press story that appeared in newspapers back in October 1931. It didn't really matter. All such presentments made for entertaining, escapist reading and added to the mystique of the Mystery Chef and his program.

The Mystery Chef's Own Cookbook, and the various titles and revised editions that followed, would inevitably be publicized as the work of the Mystery Chef but astute readers would note the copyright was assigned to John MacPherson. This was not the first cookbook to be published under the Mystery Chef's name. In 1932, Davis Baking had published *The Little Book of Excellent Recipes*, promoting recipes concocted by their radio star using Davis Baking Powder. Offered as a premium to listeners, this modest booklet became a go-to reference for thousands of homemakers and certainly encouraged MacPherson to pen his first book under his own copyright. The decision would pay off. By late in his career, MacPherson's various titles and revisions were estimated to exceed 10,000,000 copies and add considerably to the Mystery Chef's

Each applicant was asked to audition under a non-de-plume. On a whim, the man selected “Mystery Chef” as his identity.

coffers.

A REGULAR FEATURE of the *Mystery Chef* program was the option offered listeners to receive printed copies of recently featured recipes by merely sending a stamped, self-addressed envelope to the Mystery Chef. This listeners did by the millions. The seemingly never-ending avalanche of requests was used to help assess the Mystery Chef’s public appeal, a stroke of genius probably concocted by MacPherson’s well-honed advertising instincts. Based on fan mail response, the Mystery Chef was routinely ranked among the top three most popular radio celebrities.

Davis Baking sponsored *The Mystery Chef* for five years. When the Davis Company bowed out, the gas industry stepped in to fill the opening. Naturally, another giveaway cook booklet with tailored recipes was offered to listeners: *Be an Artist at the Gas Range*. In later years, Macpherson claimed 63 sponsors once backed his programs. Sometimes he would broadcast once or twice a week whereas other times he would speak to listeners daily, Monday through Friday.

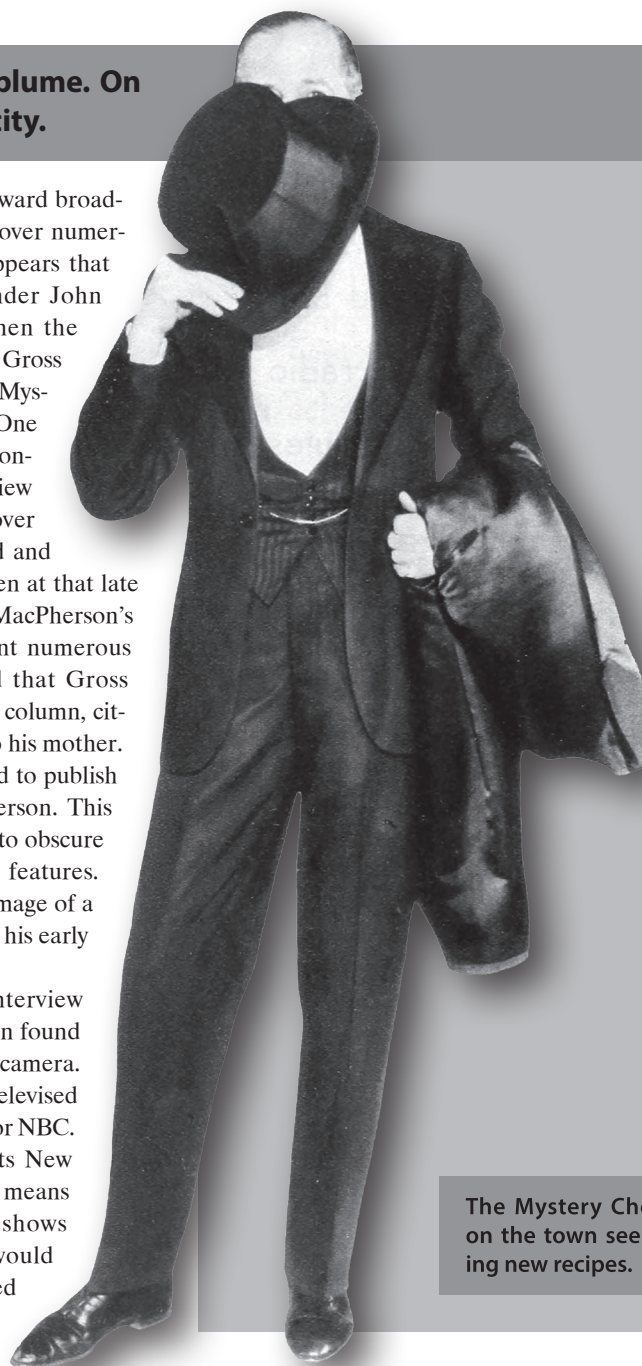
One of the elements that remained consistent throughout the long run of the series was the Chef’s obvious respect for his listeners. Each broadcast would begin with the Chef thanking them for allowing him to enter their homes. Typical of this respectful attitude was this opening to one of MacPherson’s wartime rationing broadcasts: “Good day. This is the Mystery Chef. Thank you for honoring me by inviting me into your home. Once more let me thank you for your very delightful and helpful letters.” MacPherson would eventually explain this attitude toward listeners to the radio and television critic and columnist Ben Gross in a column dated May 23, 1952. When he first went on the air, MacPherson explained, he never suffered from mike fright. Most radio beginners would imagine they were speaking to millions of listeners. John, on the other hand, wondered if “anyone” was listening to him. “Therefore, I said, ‘I thank you for honoring me by inviting me into your home.’ And that has been my attitude all along. That’s why I have never become a conventional broadcaster. I’m just an informal visitor.”

MacPherson’s attitude toward broadcasting seems to have won over numerous listeners. Indeed, it appears that Ben Gross himself fell under John MacPherson’s charm. When the opportunity presented itself, Gross made sure to promote the Mystery Chef and his activities. One column (January 1, 1949) consisted entirely of an interview at the MacPherson home over a “superb dinner” prepared and served by MacPherson. Even at that late date, despite the fact that MacPherson’s name had appeared in print numerous times, the Chef requested that Gross withhold his name from the column, citing that long-ago promise to his mother. Gross, however, was allowed to publish a current photo of MacPherson. This time, no attempt was made to obscure the Mystery Chef’s face or features. What readers saw was the image of a courtly elderly gentleman in his early 70s smiling into the camera.

Two months after his interview with Ben Gross, Macpherson found himself behind a television camera. He had signed to conduct a televised version of the *Mystery Chef* for NBC. In 1949, NBC was using its New York station, WNBT, as a means of showcasing promising shows the network was hoping would attract sponsors. A televised version of the *Mystery Chef* seemed an obvious choice. MacPherson went behind the camera on March 1, 1949, on a sustaining basis. Initially it was a 15-minute format airing every Tuesday and Thursday,

Variety (March 9, 1949) saw promise in the series. The reviewer thought the Mystery Chef seemed likeable although somewhat nervous; he possessed a cultured delivery and knew his way around a kitchen. The Chef did seem somewhat incongruous, however, attired in a business suit and French cuffs. Maybe the Chef should try an apron and rolled up sleeves?

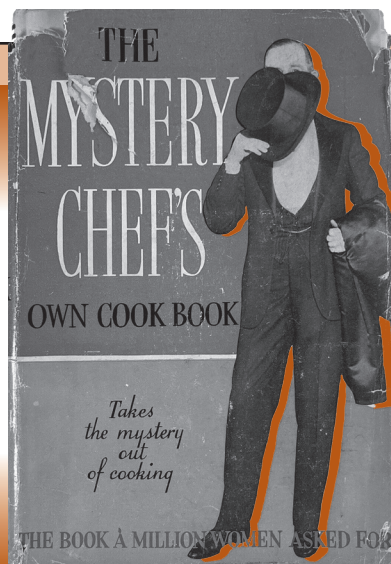
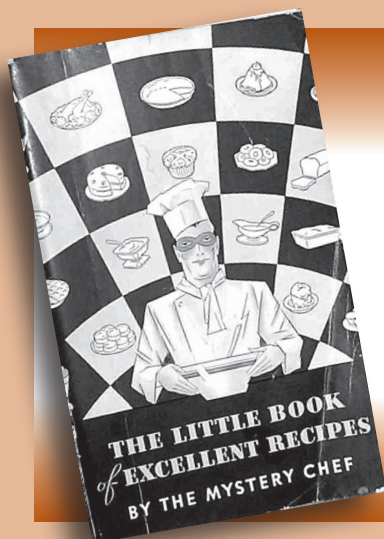
Whatever the perceived eccentricities and deficiencies the televised *Mystery Chef* may have conveyed to critics, the gamble paid off



The Mystery Chef on the town seeking new recipes.

and attracted a sponsor. The Philco Corporation purchased the series to promote its electric ranges. The *Philco Mystery Chef* was born effective with the February 16, 1950, broadcast. Transmission was switched from WNBT to WPTV, NBC’s Philadelphia station. The *Mystery Chef* was now a half-hour, Thursday afternoon series. Originating from Philadelphia, the show would be beamed back to WNBT for New York audiences.

On the surface it might have seemed that the Mystery Chef should have been basking in his multiple successes. He was still on radio, now television, and his line of cookbooks continued selling well. Unfortunately, on De-



Three of the many cook books made available to listeners by the Mystery Chef, and **AT RIGHT** enjoy two of the Chef's recipes made available by Coca-Cola and KFBK in 1945.

ember 14, 1949, his wife, Peggy, had passed away. In 40-years of marriage, the couple had never been separated even for a single day.

Variety (March 1, 1950) took aim at the sponsored TV series with a verdict that was not positive: "Entertainment-wise it's a dud." MacPherson, the reviewer said, "lacks the assurance and showmanship that a guy who has been around a mike as long as he has should possess." Essentially, what *Variety* was describing was a rather broken man in his 70s who had only recently lost his main interest in life.

Ben Gross quickly provided a countervailing opinion of the TV series. In his column of March 6, 1950, Gross praised the television series, describing MacPherson's effort as "a fascinating performance, by far the most enlightening cooking period on television."

Newspaper logs indicate the television series ran until August 31, 1951. The following year, Gross made sure to point out to his readers (April 18, 1952) that the famous Mystery Chef was about to debut in a new radio series over WOR. According to newspaper logs, this incarnation of the longtime series would run until October 23, 1952.

THIS 1952 effort constituted the end of MacPherson's regular radio appearances as the Mystery Chef. There would be an occasional public cooking demonstration while the Harry S. Goodman Company had arranged to transcribe some of MacPherson's later radio programs and

distribute the programs to stations until the late 1950s.

The Mystery Chef would also make an occasional radio guest appearance. On March 16, 1953, the Mystery Chef made a widely publicized appearance on the ABC radio series, *Time Capsule*. There, as advertised, the old man revealed his identity to listeners and explained that his name had been shrouded in mystery all through the years out of consideration for his mother's sensibilities. Of course, MacPherson's name had often seen print over the years but by speaking it aloud, finally, the old man seemed to publicly close that chapter in his life story.

Going back to that 1958 newspaper interview with Robert Peterson, MacPherson remarked that his radio program and cook-books made him a rich man. His income never dipped below \$100,000 a year. He spent lavishly and eventually most of his money was now gone though he seemed to have few regrets. He said, "at least I enjoyed my money while I had it. I gave my wonderful wife everything she wanted. And I'm glad to say I gave thousands to people during the depression who needed it more than I."

John MacPherson, radio's "Mystery Chef," passed away quietly at his Long Island home on April 23, 1962, at the age of 85.



This man will teach you to put a five course dinner on the table TEN minutes after you walk into the house

Generic newspaper advertisement of *The Mystery Chef* c.1943 sent to radio stations to interest America's housewives in creating nutritious meals under rationing conditions.



FELLOW ARTISTS OF THE RANGE:

These recipes are sent you with the compliments of the Coca-Cola Bottling Company of Sacramento. Serve ice cold Coca-Cola often and ask your friends to listen to the Mystery Chef daily on KFBK.



WEEK ENDING JANUARY 12, 1945

The number of ration points not given as they may change after these recipes go to press. Listen to the broadcasts for last minute information.

BOSTON BAKED BEANS

Broadcast January 8, '45

1 qt. beans (white navy beans, 4 cups) 4 tablespoons molasses or brown
 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon baking soda (if desired) sugar
 2 teaspoons salt (3 if no pork is used) 1 onion or small clove of garlic
 1 teaspoon dry mustard $\frac{1}{2}$ pound salt pork

Directions: Soak beans overnight. Drain and cover with fresh cold water. Bring to the boiling point, then add soda and simmer slowly for 30 min. If no soda is used, simmer longer, until tender. Test by piercing with large needle. Drain, and pour half of the beans into a bean pot. Add the salt, mustard, chopped onion, and the molasses. Cut pork into small pieces and add. Then put in the other half of the beans and barely cover the whole with boiling water. Cover the bean pot and bake in a slow oven for 8 hours. The lid should be taken off the bean pot for the last hour of cooking. If the beans become dry, add a little more water. Baked beans may be prepared in many ways, with or without pork, onions, garlic, molasses, tomatoes, catsup, Chili Sauce, green or red peppers, brown sugar, etc.

SCOTCH TEA PANCAKES (A novel recipe, little known in America. 1/9/45)

1 egg - $\frac{1}{2}$ cup powdered sugar - $\frac{1}{4}$ cup butter ($\frac{1}{4}$ cup is 2 oz) - 1 cup sifted flour
 $\frac{2}{3}$ cup milk - 2 teaspoons baking powder - $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon baking soda

Directions: Place in a bowl the butter and powdered sugar and stir these together until they become a creamy mixture. Then with a rotary egg beater, beat the egg well; beat as light as possible; add the beaten egg to the creamed sugar and butter and stir together until combined. Put into your flour sifter the 1 level cup of flour, 2 teaspoons baking powder and $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon of baking soda. Then sift this into the egg, butter and sugar mixture, stirring constantly as you sift it in. Sift a little in and stir; then sift a little more and stir. Pour in a little milk from time to time to thin the mixture until all the dry ingredients and the milk are added. This makes a rather heavier batter than the usual American pancake batter, but it is still a rather thin batter.

Put griddle over moderately slow flame. Lard, butter or other shortening can be used to just slightly grease the surface of the griddle. Now lift the batter out of the bowl, a teaspoonful at a time, and place on griddle. One heaping teaspoonful of the batter makes one pancake. When bubbles begin to appear on the top side of the pancake then carefully slide your spatula, or egg turner, under the pancake and turn it over. The pancake should be a golden brown on each side when cooked.

When to serve: Scotch pancakes are served cold just as you would serve cakes. They are delicious with a glass of cold milk or a cup of hot tea or coffee. Served as a little snack at a bridge party; for a little bite at supper time. They are particularly good for children's lunch. They keep for a considerable time if wrapped in waxed paper. Scotch pancakes will be something novel for your friends. Serve either plain or with jam or peanut butter.



Could AI have saved the Lone Ranger?

RECENTLY a friend who is an audiophile told me about a new computer program he saw demonstrated that was considered an entire radio station in a small package. Naturally, this program did everything one would expect; it had endless tracks upon which one adds such things as music, effects and voices. Moreover, one could time each track—speed up, slow down—without altering pitch. These controls had been around for a while and I recognized each, but what surprised me and, actually, startled me is that this program could alter a voice; it could take a single recorded voice, such as mine, and metamorphose my voice into a different voice altogether. In other words, I could talk to myself and those listening would hear two different people speaking.

This information all came to me second hand. I have not seen the program nor have I heard a demonstration of its abilities. But at about the same time that my friend was explaining the latest in computer audio miracles I had read a news article about a program that could mimic any voice. This article said that one could play a recording of, say, William Conrad, and the computer would recall the timbre, the pitch, cadence, etc., and convert any voice recorded to that of William Conrad's voice. They call this artificial intelligence, or AI, and talk of misinformation potential.

This all reminded me of my first feeble moments of fancying old-time radio. I was in the eighth grade—junior high they called it in those days—and a convergence of three things had given me reason to like school. First, I had discovered old-time radio through late night listening to a regional station that was rebroadcasting old radio shows—*The Lone Ranger*, *Sherlock Holmes*, *Dangerous Assignment* and *The Shadow* among others—inspiring me to pursue speech and drama. Secondly, I had convinced my parents that a tape recorder would be a valuable tool for a junior high student. Thirdly, I had taken my first speech class. And so armed with a brand-new tape recorder and radio announcers and performers as models of diction and enunciation I was determined to master the art of oral expression.

I did rather well as an oral expression student, but nothing quite excited me as one assignment in particular. Our assignment was to interpret—dramatic reading—a story into a tape recorder. Specifically, we were to find a short story and cut it to roughly 10 minutes and interpret it into a tape recorder. As the teacher got more specific my unrestrained mind got reckless. I got the idea that I could make my own radio show, and so I pleaded with the teacher to allow me to do a radio show complete with music and sound effects. He balked at first knowing such an effort would be overwhelming for one student but being the discerning teacher that he was he eventually acquiesced and let me rise or fall on my own.

I promised him that I would write and record a drama, and to this end I chose as my subject *The Lone Ranger*. I decided to write a 10-minute “lost episode” titled “The Devil of Hells Canyon,” a rip-off of every western tale about crooked businessmen trying to scare Indians off their land. My overly ambitious plan required that I play all parts—The Lone Ranger, Tonto, the sheriff, Indian chief, and the crooked saloon keeper and his henchman. I would also create my own sound effects. I was a one-man gang, a jack-of-all-trades and, as

I would find out, a master at none.

I rehearsed diligently, altering my voice as best as I could even to the point of altering pace and dropping a full octave for some characters and rising a half-stop for others. The worst part, however, was timing the music and sound effects. The music—William Tell, of course—was on a record as was the background effect of a western town. Footsteps were two shoes next to the cocoanut shells used for horses' hooves. Gunshots were made by striking my mother's wooden spoon against an old leather footstool whose stuffing flew every which way with every shot. Where did these come from? From the library, of course. I had found an old book about radio broadcasting which included a section on creating sound effects.

The big production day had come, and I isolated myself in our family room. I placed a large sign on the door that read, *recording, do not enter*. All was ready; rehearsals had prepared me for multitasking. I hit the record button and then dropped the needle on the phonograph. The overture played. I lowered the volume and channeling Fred Foy I read the opening signature. I faded the music and began my drama in earnest. I used the cocoanuts, meaning aurally that Silver and Scout had entered the canyon. The Lone Ranger and Tonto then explained their suspicions that greedy businessmen were behind a plot to steal Indians' land. I hit pause on the recorder. Time to change scenes and change records. I put on the sound effects record with the western town ambiance. I used the shoes to walk along the boardwalk; I opened the cupboard door but forgot to attenuate the volume on the phonograph. Inside or outside the ambiance was the same. Oh well. Inside the sheriff's office the Lone Ranger explained his theory about the “devil of Hells Canyon” to the sheriff. As I finished the scene I realized that my sheriff sounded a lot like a weak Fred Foy imitation. Oh well. Fred had a part in this one.

I would like to say that I got everything in one take, but it took multiple—multiple—takes to get just the first couple of scenes done to satisfaction. Satisfaction? What satisfaction? When completed—rather, when finished—upon playback this so-called lost episode of *The Lone Ranger* was not just a disappointment but an embarrassment. Timing was certainly misaligned and awkward, but worse the voices on playback were all strained as if someone was trying to disguise his voice multiple times.

Advance 60 years and a machine can do everything that I was trying to do. All I would need to do is speak into the computer, and that “Buck Rogers stuff” would do the rest. The results would be impressive, and my project's value would be up to my teacher's appraisal, which, I'm sure, would be assisted by AI. Funny thing, though. As much as my effort was a disappointment I don't think I would have had as much fun as I had had toiling with such antiquated technology.

Oh, and, no, I didn't submit the lost episode of *The Lone Ranger*. As I mentioned, the results were, well, humiliating, and so I turned my skills to something manageable. Late on a Sunday night before school, I read Edgar Allan Poe's “The Tell-Tale Heart” into the tape recorder, and never had the written word had more meaning for this lowly student than Poe's: “nervous,—very, very dreadfully nervous I had been and am; but why will you say that I am mad?”



The Mysterious Traveler is on special assignment. He'll return next month.

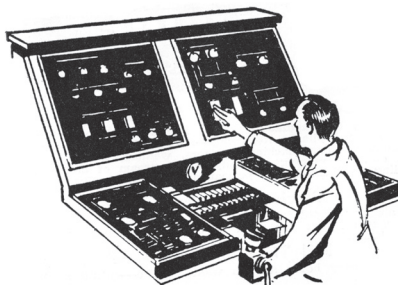


HOLLYWOOD. January 18, 1949. Well, a physical culture expert in New York says the average American males sag so badly it's a wonder that women pay them any mind at all. Brother, you may know your male muscles, but you're a bit flabby on feminine psychology.

To begin with, lots of girls don't mind a man's chin sagging if his bank account doesn't. And a romantic few would pass up a pot-tummied bank account for a man without a pot tummy. But most of us poor girls end up by gladly carrying sagging men with dropping bank accounts across the wedding threshold.

This health expert advises home exercise for husbands, which really means home exercise for the wives. Whenever George puts in a session at trying to touch his toes, poor little me has to drape him over my shoulder, cart him off to bed, and wait on him an foot until he recovers.!

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