

TREAD WITH FRED ALLEN • 'SING IT AGAIN' IS 'STOP THE MUSIC' ALL OVER AGAIN



Volume 47 • Number 5

AUGUST 2023

LET'S KEEP THE 'P' IN SPERDVAC!



**Saving  
Private  
Radio**





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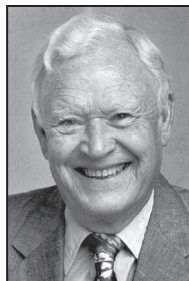
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## from the president

### GREETINGS SPERDVAC MEMBERS!

**I**BEGIN this month's message by paying heartfelt tribute to our beloved Jimmy Weldon, a cherished member of our community who left us on July 6th. As we approach September 23rd, which would have marked Jimmy's 100th birthday, we remember his remarkable career and the indelible mark he left on the world of entertainment. From being Clarence Nash's understudy for Donald Duck to collaborating with Jack Webb on the iconic *Dragnet* TV show, Jimmy's contributions were diverse and exceptional. His credits included hit TV shows like *The Rockford Files*, *The Waltons*, *Alfred Hitchcock Presents*, *Dallas*, *The Flintstones*, *The Halls of Ivy*, and *The Webster Webfoot Show*. Yet, it was his adorable portrayal of Yakky Doodle on *The Yogi Bear Show* that endeared him to millions.



Beyond his talent as a consummate performer, Jimmy was a true patriot, a dedicated veteran, and an all-around good-hearted individual. I was privileged to work with him on multiple occasions, and his energy and authenticity in every performance were awe-inspiring. One particular instance during the table read rehearsal of *The Dark Avenger* – "The Ten Dollar Bill" left us all in awe of his prowess. He breathed life into the scene and made the bar room setting so vivid that we couldn't help but be captivated. In memory of his exceptional talent, we are considering sharing a recording of that show on our website for everyone to enjoy. Jimmy's book, *Go Get'm Tiger*, is a marvelous journey and an absolute delight to read. To Jimmy's friends and family, the entire SPERDVAC family extends its heartfelt condolences.

This month, the theme of our *Radiogram* is "Audio Preservation," represented by the 'P' in SPERDVAC. Our board of directors is actively pursuing efforts to enhance the storage and restoration of our precious audio disc collection, which

comprises thousands of valuable recordings. These treasures are perishable, and our goal is not only to preserve them but also to make their contents accessible to all members. The success of this endeavor hinges on your support, and in the coming weeks, we will be sending out letters to detail how you can be part of this vital project.

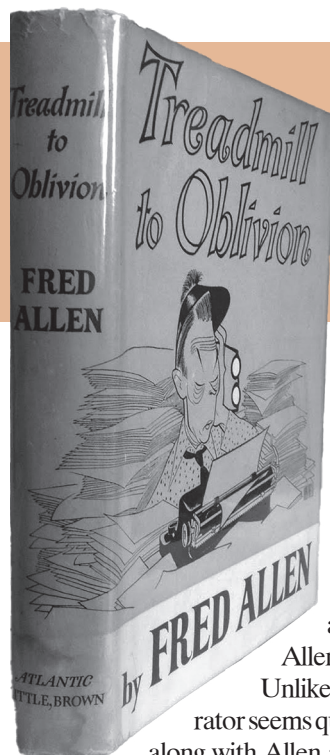
As we approach August, it reminds us that our first-ever virtual convention is merely two months away. We are excitedly preparing for this event, and I encourage you to keep a close eye on your email, our website, and the SPERDVAC Facebook page for updates. Further information will be provided in the September *Radiogram*.

Before concluding, I want to express my sincere gratitude to each one of you who participated in our SPERDVAC member survey. Your responses are immensely valuable, and our board of directors is diligently collecting and analyzing the information. Your feedback guides us in growing our organization, enhancing member benefits, and responsibly curating the SPERDVAC archives. Remember, you can always share your thoughts and suggestions with us by contacting [info@spervac.com](mailto:info@spervac.com).

I extend my appreciation to our exceptionally gifted and patient *Radiogram* editor, who is eagerly awaiting this article's submission. With your permission, I shall address other topics in next month's message.

Until then, stay safe and stay tuned.📻

*Timothy Knofler*



# Tread with Fred

by  
Clair Schulz



**I**N 1954 Little, Brown published a seminal book on radio written by an insider who was there almost at the creation of that medium. Nearly 70 years later a worthy exercise for mind and spirits is to low recommendations on the dust by John Steinbeck, H. Allen Smith, and James Thurber by joining Fred Allen on his *Treadmill to Oblivion*.

Unlike other reminiscences in which the narrator seems quite remote, readers of this book walk along with Allen as he transitions from the vaudeville

stage where comedians thrived on laughter and applause to become one of the pioneers in broadcasting a show before an audience. He explains in his usual facetious manner how running gags involving a mynah and an escape artist stumbled out of the gate and why the Fred Allen–Jack Benny feud finished in the money.

Readers feel the uphill grind of writing and assembling a weekly 60-minute variety program 39 weeks a year B.T. (Before Transcriptions). Two-a-days in vaudeville were a walk in the park compared to doing a show from 9 to 10 PM in New York and then a repeat broadcast at midnight for the West Coast. Getting little sleep, eating erratic meals, working much of the following week on the next show, timing rehearsals, and doing endless rewrites for eight years seemed “like a recipe for a nervous breakdown.” Feeding an endless supply of jokes that satisfied stuffy executives into the gaping maw of network radio became a treadmill for the gag-worn and bag-eyed comic. At that time Fred’s response to wife Portland Hoffa’s greeting of “You look tired” could have been “I’m more haggard than H. Rider working in King Solomon’s mines. I could say I’m more exhausted than Mrs. Wearybottom trying to find her seat in Fibber McGee’s closet, but the censor would just cut it out.”

Readers join Fred in a sigh of relief as he provides reasons for the growth and popularity of a half-hour show highlighted by a stroll down Allen’s Alley. Senator Bloat and Falstaff Openshaw stuck their heads out briefly before Titus Moody, Mrs. Nussbaum, Senator Claghorn, and Ajax Cassidy signed longer leases. Allen claims the characters were developed for their regional appeal and that they were not resented by citizens who lived in different sections of the country. Twenty-seven pages of dialogue provide ample proof that dialects were not necessary for exchanges with the Alley residents to

be amusing.

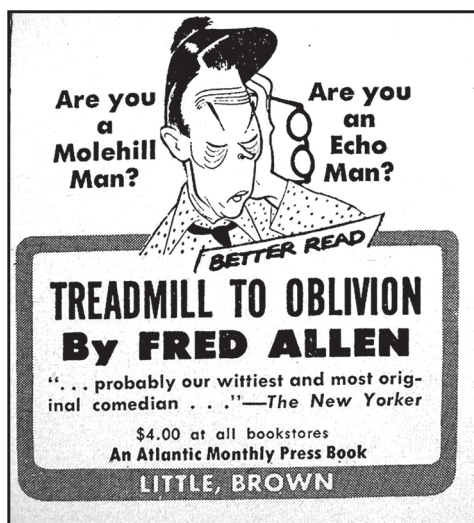
A distinctive element that makes *Treadmill to Oblivion* a jolly joyride rather than a tiresome task is that well over half of the 240 pages are excerpts from scripts written by the author. Taking flight with the infamous eagle named Ramshaw and observing how hammy Orson Welles grabs all the lines from frustrated Fred in scenes from *Les Misérables* read almost as funny as the broadcasts. Allen believed many celebrities preferred to appear on his show because he gave them freedom to break with their traditional personas and be presented to better advantage in skits and parodies. Spoofs with Maurice Evans, Charles Laughton, James Mason, Lauritz Melchior, Basil Rathbone, flamboyant Tallulah Bankhead, and irreverent Oscar Levant provided a welcome change for both performers and audiences. Leo Durocher

crooning a Dodger-flavored version of *H.M.S. Pinafore* pleased fans in the stands, and Beatrice Lillie’s rendition of Fred’s takeoff on *Oklahoma!* called “Piccadilly” set the stage for a merry mock trial with plaintiffs Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein II.

The book clearly demonstrates that, whether writing scripts or radio history, Fred Allen was an inveterate wit and improviser. Over the microphone Portland’s voice “sounded like two slate pencils mating or a clarinet reed calling for help.” Playing an organ solo midway through a comedy show “is like planting a pickle in the center of a charlotte russe.” A script supervisor was “so high-strung he could have gone to a masquerade as a tennis racquet.” Giveaway shows like *Stop the Music* that hastened the exit of his

program prompted a string of sardonic comments on inappropriate prizes awarded to unlucky recipients such as “a man who becomes seasick at the sight of whitecaps on two Good Humor men wins a four-week cruise to South America.” Yet the printed page cannot convey the untrammelled sense of gleeful spontaneity present on the Allen shows due to Fred’s persistent ad-libbing which kept execs on their toes and listeners on the edges of their seats wondering, “What is he going to say next?”

After stating some keen observations about the fundamental differences between radio and television, Allen sadly concludes that all a comedian has left for years of toiling on the air is the echo of forgotten laughter. Even on an early visit to Allen’s Alley, Fred sounded a seriocomic note by remarking, “Is anyone alive on this program? We might be the annex to the Smithsonian Institution come to life here.” Anyone with life here in this century can still find much to savor in the words written and spoken by one of the foremost humorists of the last century. 🐦





# MAINTAINING THE 'P' IN SPERDVAC

by Sean Dougherty  
Membership Chair

**B**EING A SPERDVAC MEMBER is an important contribution to keeping the memory of classic radio alive, not only by being part of a community of fans that shares information and opinions about the hobby but also by helping to support efforts in preservation (the "p" in our name).

Our team is working behind the scenes to convert SPERDVAC's extensive library of audio and video to digital formats we can share on our website and in some cases in the broader hobby.

Board member Corey Harker is managing transfers from transcription discs while fellow board member Zach Eastman is leading the effort to meta tag and inventory the files. Both are labor intensive jobs but the result is permanent, high-quality versions of shows that otherwise could be lost to history.

The four additional volunteers led by Corey and Zach and responsible for the 100s of shows that are online now at sperdvac.com to listen to in absolutely idealized sound. The current database has more than 220 programs in it and is growing all the time.

The team's current output is 10-20 shows per week with a target of 50 per month.

Your membership dues and donations keep this vital preservation effort alive and we thank you so much for your support of SPERDVAC.

Transferring a program from a transcription disk to digital is not as simple as popping a disc into a computer and hitting "copy." Expensive ultrasonic cleaning devices and specialty turntables are necessary to clean and play the discs. Then Corey and his team have to digitally fix interruptions in the sound caused by physical defects, a painstaking process.

Zach's job is to make the final product useful to our members by tagging it with data. His process goes well beyond just program titles and dates, including cast members and themes, so if you are looking for a detective show or a comedy, or a specific actor, any of those terms will work. Some categories, like comedies, are straightforward while others, such as mysteries, detective shows and police shows, have overlap that requires judgment. He also listens to each file for up to five minutes to make sure the identification is correct.

We just received a large digital donation of Lone Ranger episodes from a collector that need tagging/archiving. Even when the digital transfer is complete, the work is just beginning!

The current team builds on the work that's been done by club members since its founding but in a more organized, sustainable way. SPERDVAC members have in the past saved vast collections of discs, scripts and other unique historical media by acting fast to obtain collections before they could be discarded by heirs or thrown out by radio stations cleaning out their back closets but that also led to a collection that is not organized in a way accessible to all members.

Corey and Zach are working to evolve SPERDVAC's preservation effort beyond the basic "make sure these great programs still exist in any form," to "make sure these great programs still exist in the best possible audio quality and accessible to fans and researchers alike to learn from and enjoy."

We thank you again for your continued support of SPERDVAC and these efforts and will have more updates soon on our progress.

If you have the expertise and interest to support this effort, please let us know and we'll turn you over to Zach and Corey for assignment.🎙️



# *Preservation Row*

**PRESERVING AND SHARING SPERDVAC'S MEDIA LIBRARY**

**by Zach Eastman & Corey Harker**

**T**HE EARLIEST DAYS OF SPERDVAC were a necessary and important resource that undoubtedly many reading this *Radiogram* will recognize.

You may have struggled to find a program, a commercial, a news broadcast, or an interview in the nascent days of collecting. There were usually only two answers:

1. An LP of 1 or 2 shows, or clips and short selections from various programs (*ala* Golden Days of Radio and the like).

2. Reel-to-reel tapes that would be traded among collectors across the country if not the world.

SPERDVAC sought to go directly to the original sources. The organization accumulated transcription discs from the broadcast era until it amassed what would become a sizable collection of tens of thousands of discs. By the time the world chugged its train into the 1980s and 1990s, the distribution of these discs in the form of cassette tape and CD-RW to the members became an invaluable perk of membership.

But then, as quickly as one could hear that now ancient crackle of dialing into an AOL browser, the internet arrived. Suddenly, everyone seemed to have access to much more than any one collector could possess.

SPERDVAC needed to keep up with the changes that the Internet brought to collectors. We are currently evolving our preservation mission to go beyond making shows available to members to making sure they are preserved forever in the best-possible quality.

Much of this starts with the discs themselves. The current board has authorized a trial to begin to improve the physical security of the transcription discs on our collection and to transfer the contents to high-quality digital files. Our collection of transcription discs has been stored for years, but the existing storage needs to be changed to a climate-controlled environment to first preserve their shelf life. In addition, our first and most important effort of SPERDVAC in continuing to pursue the 'P' in our name is to take a closer look at these discs.

This is where our disc preservation team, led by board member Corey Harker, has been hard at work. As discs are processed by his methodology and technology, SPERDVAC is in the process of re-evaluating, repairing, and transferring the broadcasts from these discs once again. Currently, Harker leads a team of four to start sifting through the many treasures contained in our vaults and bringing them back into fighting shape.

Now some may wonder, understandably, why this must be done yet again if we already have many of those recordings available on our website or other stored media. There are important reasons:

1. As technology advances, the method of digital format has grown beyond the capabilities of FLAC and MP3 storage. In a way, we are riding a ".WAV." Re-copying the discs for digital preservation with modern tools will help secure pristine digital copies in the highest possible quality. This will help to ensure not only the ability to fine tune and repair the recordings that need love and care, but will also provide listeners with a listening experience that trumps anything currently floating around free of charge on YouTube or archive.org. Our members are the ones who deserve the highest quality imaginable and this will ensure that quality.

2. Discs, like anything physical, have a shelf life. We are entering an era in which many of these transcriptions will disintegrate if not rescued at once. Not unlike film deterioration, these discs run the same risk no matter how great the storage circumstances are. Thus, in order to properly re-transcribe these discs to the digital world,

they are undergoing careful cleaning prior to transfer thanks to Corey's foresight. He is utilizing a sonic disc cleaning system that will remove dirt and unnecessary elements from the disc. Once the disc is as clean as it can be, it will be transcribed to a digital format that will provide the clearest sound the disc can provide. This will be done before any needed scratch repair will be done in the computer.

3. There are also classic radio show performances that are in the collection that have never been transferred. Going once more through our inventory of discs allows us to potentially discover treasures whether big or small that have never been heard beyond their airdate. Radio fans always love to hear something old become new again, and this careful process allows that to happen.

Considering the size of our transcription disc collection, this entire process will take time. For now, you may also be wondering, "How can I listen to what we currently have?"

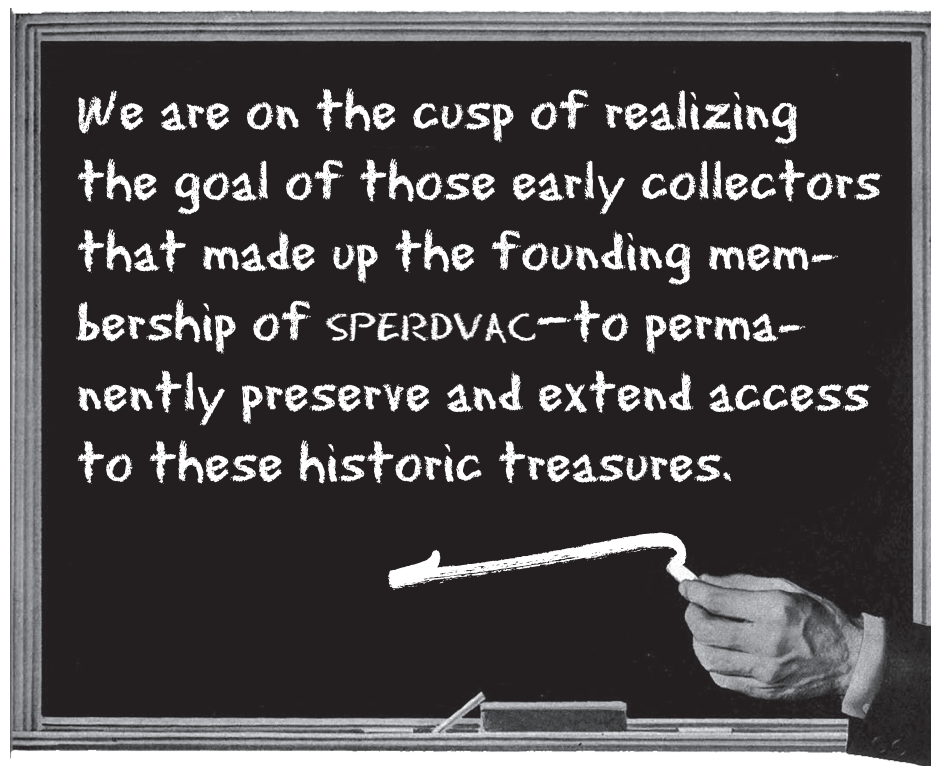
Enter Zach Eastman. Hey, that's me !

I am happy to tell you that our current library of audio files has been undergoing a continuous transfer to the streaming service provided to members currently on our website. This has not been an easy process as it not only includes a transfer of the audio files, but a complete reorganization of them.

Why a reorganization? Despite a very thorough cataloging many years ago, this was done very simply without regard to then needs of a digital storage environment.

When files were transferred from a digital file to a CD-RW to mail it to a member, they were never labeled and cataloged by show name, radio star, sponsor, and other details that would allow for our members to search for them within our database.

My task has been to go through these files, in conjunction with the PDF of the original catalog, and re-label all these files using a technology known as meta-data tagging. This information is then provided to our webmaster—along with an assigned serial number for each file. This allows our webmaster to input this data into our streaming platform so that, upon full completion, you will be able to search for shows by *Show Name*, *Radio*



*Star*, *Sponsor*, or any other element that has been identified by a meta-data tag.

These activities of disc preservation and preparing and implementing files for our streaming library take time and volunteer hours. While our disc preservation team has four people involved, the streaming library job constitutes one member, myself. This does mean that all of these treasures will take time.

This shouldn't discourage the faithful reader and enthusiast. As we know, anything that takes time and energy to produce will only ensure a better result than any quick fix can offer. That time taken also comes with care. Whether it's ensuring a single piece of dust is carefully removed from a disc or that a show with very little information can receive professional assessment before being labeled and cataloged, will take time and care but will bring forth a valuable asset.

So I encourage you to utilize your membership benefit, while you wait for discs to transfer, and take a look at the 200+ plus shows now available to stream on the SPERDVAC website. That number is only going to keep growing month by month, so you will get to watch SPERDVAC rediscover its library.

We are on the cusp of realizing the goal of those early collectors that made up the founding membership of SPERDVAC—to

permanently preserve and extend access to these historic treasures.

We hope you will join us in the effort either by volunteering (send any offers to [info@spervac.com](mailto:info@spervac.com)), donating funds to help support our equipment and shipping expenses, or even just enjoying our work through our streaming benefit.🎧



"Whew! So many and so little time!"

# YOU

can help us preserve THE GOLDEN AGE OF RADIO DRAMA, VARIETY AND COMEDY. Join our preservation team by volunteering your time and talent or by donating funds to help support our equipment and shipping expenses. Please contact us at [info@spervac.com](mailto:info@spervac.com).

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*How It Is Done*

# Saving Priv





# ivate Radio

by Doug Hopkinson

**I**N THE BEGINNING was the transcription disc. Contained on this disc was a recorded broadcast that could be rebroadcast, and radio stations were supplied with this records for programming. *Amos 'n' Andy* was the first radio program to be syndicated and distributed on these electrical transcription discs, or ETs, in the late 1920s. This single practice of syndication caught on with producers and stations and soon evolved into a major broadcasting business. By 1933 there were an estimated 30 companies producing programming exclusively for ET recording including such recognizable names as Lang-Worth, World Broadcasting, and Ziv

Much of OTR stems from these discs, which is considered the raw material or the raw audio of radio. These are the base files that are used to produce, for example, what OTR preservationists Radio Archives (RA) calls it “sparkling audio.”

The single primary reason to preserve raw audio is because of the constant technology advances in audio software. Every year we are closer to an AI audio repair program that will analyze and perfect the audio until it's like you are standing in the studio—all with the click of a mouse. It's going to happen, I know, because I asked chatGPT the other day and she confirmed it.

Having identified quality raw audio as being the key to the kingdom, so to speak, how does one best go about coaxing it from a transcription disc? In order to answer that, let's first get familiar with transcription discs.

Electrical transcription discs are found in two common sizes: 12-inch diameter and 16-inch diameter. They can also be found in other non-standard sizes up to 22-inch in diameter. A 16-diameter is by far and away the most common size. Transcription discs can be made from many different materials. One type of early transcription disc was heavy records referred to as shellacs. These beauties can weigh up to 3lbs in 16-diameter.

Other early transcription discs were made using a black nitrocellulose lacquer coating over an aluminum core. This type of disc is commonly referred to as an “acetate” or “lacquer.” Using the term *acetate* is a misnomer since there is no acetate involved in the manufacturing process of these discs although acetate, a nylon-based plastic, was used for records before vinyl became the standard. It should be noted that during WWII, glass was used as a substitute substrate, replacing the aluminum core, which was needed for the war effort.

In 1932, RCA Victor developed a thermoplastic resin they called Victrolac. It was more flexible than shellac but it was still a fairly brittle material.

Vinyl was used for records as early as 1930 by RCA Victor but timing is everything and people were not interested in technology when they had no food or money enough to buy the equipment to play a record. Finally, in 1948, Columbia made vinyl a standard substrate for its pressings because of its overall economy, performance, strength and flexibility. It proved to be the most resilient of all substrates.

As previously revealed, in order to have the best quality restored audio you need to start out with the best quality unprocessed, or “raw,” audio files and there are five factors that will determine how good your raw audio files will sound.

**F**IRST, there is the physical condition of the transcription disc. A disc can be dirty, warped, scratched, chipped, cracked, and worse. Those of us who preserve discs have no control over the physical condition of a disc; what we have is what we have but we can, for instance, undo a warp fairly simply. We can also overcome some skips and we can glue a broken disc back together. But we cannot put Humpty-Dumpty

## In Praise of Preservationists

**IN THE BEGINNING**, for sure, there were transcription discs. They were held by the producers themselves or stored in the back rooms of radio stations. They were always at the point of destruction because what was a person to do with such antiquated technology of programs that nobody wanted to hear. And so many were sent to the junk heap. Those lucky enough to survive found refuge in private collections where they remained until donated to archives such as Radio Archives and SPERDVAC where the discs were assured a safe haven.

But the discs themselves don't last forever. Attention and care are needed, and when an archive reaches thousands of discs that maintenance and care require an army of preservationists. And most often this army is composed of volunteers.

We cannot thank enough this volunteer army for preserving our history. As we all know there is something magical about hearing an old-time radio broadcast. It takes us to a different time and place but it also tells us things about our culture—the good and the bad—and it leads us to a better understanding of ourselves at the present time. Just think about it; don't we all just cringe a bit when hearing a cigarette commercial, especially one that claims that so many *doctors* prefer a certain brand of smoke? Or flinch at hearing Father Coughlin's outrageous rants, er, sermons? Good Lord, indeed!

Our preserved radio programs entertain us through a special type of presentation—one wholly void of pictures. Just the opposite of our modern way. Radio is a medium that uses words—*imagine that!*—augmented by sounds . . . music and natural sounds such as footsteps, wind in the trees, rolling brooks, and—*horrors!*—gunshots and turning a man inside out! Radio stimulates the imagination and thus it claims rightly so to be the “theatre of the mind.” We are so inspired by what has gone before that we strive to repeat the effect and thus, we produce new audio drama. This is the power of old-time radio—preserved for us by a volunteer army of dedicated preservationists.

SPERDVAC friend Doug Hopkinson, himself a long-time OTR preservationist, gives us a description of how these patient and perfectionist preservationists do their jobs.👤

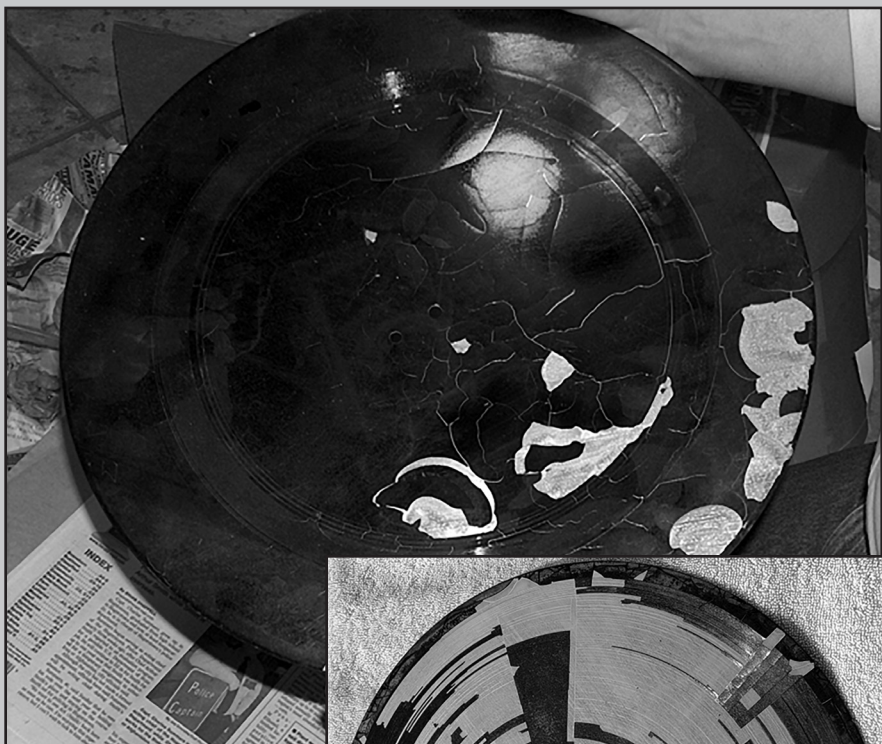


together again as if he hadn't fallen—but with modern technology we get quite close. But the bottom line is that the better the physical condition of the disc the better the resultant audio file will be.

**THE SECOND FACTOR** in getting the best quality audio is the equipment we use for playing the discs. The better the equipment, of course, the better the sound during transfer. For many years, collectors had to use the same machines that the radio stations had, namely the old workhorse, the RCA Type 70. These machines are the size of a small washing machine, and at one time these machines were state-of-the-art but that time has come and gone. There are still hobbyists who use these machines, and if they use these machines to make digital transfers the resultant file is full of disagreeable things like rumble, wow, and flutter. In addition, the nail-like stylus that sits at the end of the 2-pound tonearm is constantly wearing down the grooves. This is *not* the type of equipment one wants to use even though it is the original equipment and may have a nostalgic appeal. Luckily, modern contrivances allow us access to the golden past through custom turntables. For example, Rek-O-Kut was a company that manufactured turntables that went out of business many years ago. But the name was licensed to Esoteric Sound, which uses the name to identify their own customized transcription turntables. These customized turntables are a hobby staple today.

Having the proper turntable is half of the equation, though. The other half—the better half—is the stylus. Those of us old enough to remember the phonograph more often referred to the stylus as the “needle,” that miniscule tip attached to the cartridge which is joined to the headshell which in turn is connected to the tonearm. Since every transcription disc is different—one will have worn grooves, one will have micro grooves—the grooves are different on every disc. In order to get the best sound, the preservationist wants the needle to make good contact with the groove wall where the sound resides. If the stylus is too narrow, it will ride at the bottom of the groove making contact low on the groove wall. If the stylus is too wide it will ride at the top of

## Going . . . Going . . . Gone



Of all the different types of transcription discs, lacquers are by far the most sensitive to their immediate climate. This breakdown process will continue until the lacquer flakes away leaving only a bare aluminum disc. Obviously, whatever was recorded is gone forever. But modern technology has enabled the preservationist to save the recording if caught in time.





# Wash Day for Preservationist



One cannot simply stand a stack of discs in the tank and let them shake. It was perhaps possible, but the labels would get wet and smear, or fall off, or both! Here is human ingenuity at its best. Threaded rod, nylon spacers, wingnuts, and a couple pieces of 1x1 pine board, allowed a radio archivist to clean 15 discs at a time and keep the labels out of the water. CENTER: Discs are all ultrasonically cleaned, then ultrasonically rinsed, and then receive a final reverse osmosis water bath to make sure all dirt and chemicals are off of the discs before they go to the next staging area. ABOVE: The final step in cleaning is letting the discs fully dry before transferring them.

the groove and may not even stay in the groove at all. The only way to know which size stylus will yield the best sound from a given disc is to try them all out until the best result is acquired. Not only are there different widths, there are also different shapes on the tip of the stylus, which are referred to as truncated and elliptical. More importantly, a worn stylus can cause damage to the groove walls. This is why it is important to have a good selection of styli to choose from and replacements at hand. It's all about the needle reading the groove wall. There will always be one stylus that sounds better than the others, and so, as they say, the right tool for the job.

**THE THIRD FACTOR** to ensure the best quality audio is to cleaning the disc thoroughly before playing it. Most of these transcription discs are between 70 and 90 years of age. Grooves can be impacted by dirt. Even discs that have never been played can have dirt and dust in the grooves, and there can be detritus from the manufacturing process left within the groove walls. In addition, all the different types of transcription discs have design flaws, as it were. For example, lacquers are by far the most sensitive to their immediate climate (Ideally, all transcription discs should be stored in a cool, dry place). It is very common for lacquers to become cloudy and begin forming a sticky white substance on the surface known as palmitic acid. This is the result of the nitrocellulose lacquer coating chemically breaking down.

This breakdown process will continue until the lacquer flakes away leaving only a bare aluminum disc. Palmitic acid can easily be washed off and that will halt the process temporarily, but normally, once a disc begins to form palmitic acid, it leads to a slow death and an unplayable transcription disc. Delamination is not always caused by palmitic acid. Damage to the disc can cause chipping of the coating, letting air get underneath, and time works its magic. This is why careful handling and proper storage is important; it can mean the difference between hearing a show from nearly a century ago or having it crumble away never to be heard again.

Other types of discs have their own imperfections as well, but all discs have one





The raw material of old-time radio, transcription discs, in climate-controlled storage at Radio Archives awaiting transfer to digital technology.

thing in common: grooves. As I stated, cleaning is important, and I can't stress that point enough so I will repeat that cleaning is the number one game changer for improving audio quality in the world of preservation.

By and large, though, it is dirt that creates the utmost threat to salvaging the best sound quality. Simply put, less dirt means more groove, and more groove means more sound. But dirt is not easy to remove from the narrow crevices of record grooves. Dirt that has settled for 70 to 90 years is, unfortunately, practically permanent but there are modern methods by which to cleanse those grooves. So, what is the best way to clean transcription discs? Most collectors clean their discs manually with a microfiber washcloth,

a little water and some elbow grease. I have witnessed transcription discs being washed in the kitchen sink with dish soap and a dish brush. Some hobbyists swear by the Disc Doctor and its products. The only professional record-cleaning machine is the Keith Monks Machine, which is very expensive and washes one disc at a time.

The process of cleaning a disc requires water, some type of cleaning agent and a cloth or brush. Depending on the type of brush used, there is always a possibility of groove damage which will affect the audio to some extent, especially if you are using a dish brush. But a more risk-free method is "touchless" technology, which is used by most preservationists today. The term *touchless* means there

will be no damage to the grooves from scrubbing with an inappropriate brush. Instead, touchless involves the use of two ultrasonic cleaning tanks, one for the chemical wash and one for the rinse. The main ingredient is a powerful surfactant, which is a chemical that reduces the surface tension of any liquid, enhancing the liquid's ability to spread and saturate. This helps water get down into the grooves and lift out dirt.

**THE FOURTH FACTOR** to great transfers is applying an equalization curve to the audio. This is done by a chronologic equalizer such as the KAB EQS MK12. When transferring from discs, however, a preamp is required because the input levels are too low coming from the cartridge. Equalization curves are built into preamplifiers. Modern preamplifiers have the Recording Industry Association of America, or RIAA, curve (started in 1954). Using modern equipment with RIAA curve built in, to record a disc that



**By and large, though, it is dirt that creates the utmost threat to salvaging the best sound quality. Simply put, less dirt means more groove, and more groove means more sound.**

*Continued Page 15*



## THIS WEEK'S

Programming highlights for the week of  
Saturday, March 29 thru Friday, April 4  
1941

# Radio Events

ORSON WELLES, fresh from his filming of the long-anticipated *Citizen Kane* and now making frequent radio appearances, will add another air performance by starring this week on *Silver Theatre*

### Saturday, March 29

BERT LYTELL and Lenore Ulric, both veteran dramatic artists, will co-star on the Lincoln Highway dramatization this Saturday. NBC 9:00 a.m.

COUNTRY JOURNAL will present as guests some of the delegates to the National Farm Chemurgic Council. They will discuss with farm reporter Charlie Stookey the utilization of farm products, especially corn, in modern industry. CBS. 9:00 a.m.

NATIONAL FARM AND HOME HOUR will feature Saturday a report on the highlight of the seventh annual conference of the National Farm Chemurgic Council in Chicago. Fats and oils, latest developments in rubber and textiles, plastics and new facts about essential oils are among the subjects to be treated. NBC. 9:30 a.m.

PRESIDENT ROOSEVELT will speak at the annual Jackson Day dinner, to be broadcast from the Mayflower hotel in Washington, DC, Saturday night. NBC, CBS, MBS. 6:30 p.m.

TOSCANINI returns to the podium of the NBC Symphony program for a series of four broadcasts. The program starts one-half hour later this week on account of the Jackson Day dinner. NBC. 7:00 p.m.

### Sunday, March 30

FRED PERRY, former world's amateur tennis champion and now a professional net star, will be the guest of "I'm an American." Perry was born on Stockport, England, came to the United States in 1935 and is now a naturalized American citizen. NBC. 9:15 a.m.

BEHIND THE MIKE will present a salute to *Eno Crime Clues*, one of the pioneer mystery-thriller programs. Jane Coiuzzens, singer, will be one of the guests on this Sunday's program, in addition to the *Crime Clues* salute. NBC. 1:30 p.m.

JOE AND MABEL, new sketch that has caught on with the listening public in a big way, has changed its broadcast time, moving one-half hour later on Sunday. NBC. 2:00 p.m.

ORSON WELLES, fresh from his filming of the long-anticipated *Citizen Kane* and now making frequent radio appearances, will add another air performance by starring this week on *Silver Theatre* in "One Step Ahead" by John Latouche, one of the writers of the sensational

"Ballad for Americans." CBS. 3:00 p.m.

ROSALIND RUSSELL and Cary Grant will appear in "My Girl Friday" on *Screen Guild Theatre*. CBS. 9:30 p.m.

CHASE AND SANBORN PROGRAM will present as guest Jack Oakie, feeling, perhaps, cockier than ever after his clever characterization as Benito Mussolini in *The Great Dictator*. But he'll probably meet his aggressive match in another little dictator—Charlie McCarthy. NBC. 5:00 p.m.

RICHARD CROOKS, great American tenor, will be soloist on *The Ford Sunday Evening Hour*. CBS. 6:00 p.m.

FRANK BUCK, big-game hunter of *Bring 'em Back Alive* fame, will be guest of Bill Stern. NBC. 6:45 p.m.

VICE-PRESIDENT HENRY A. WALLACE will deliver an address before the triennial National Convention of B'nai B'rith, Jewish fraternal organization, this Sunday from Chicago. CBS. Time Not Available.

### Monday, March 31

HYMNS OF ALL CHURCHES, starring baritone Joe Emerson, and the cooking talks of Betty Crocker are now heard on CBS instead of NBC. Emerson sings Monday, Tuesday and Thursday. Betty Crocker talks Wednesday and Friday. CBS. 8:45 a.m.

CAVALCADE OF AMERICA switches from Wednesday to Monday, effective this week, taking over the spot left vacant by *The Burns and Allen Show*, which closed its series last week. Starting on the first Cavalcade show in the new spot will be Paul Muni, one of this generation's greatest actors, in a dramatization of the life of Edwin Booth, immortalized actor of the 19th Century. NBC. 7:30 p.m.

MARGARET SPEAKS, soprano, returns to the solo spot on Voice of Firestone for a series of broadcasts. NBC. Time Not Available.

### Tuesday, April 1

WOODY HERMAN, leader of one of the top swing bands, will be among the guests on *We, the People*. CBS. 9:00 p.m.

KATE SMITH, in Hollywood for a few weeks, will make a guest appearance on Bob Hope's program. NBC. 7:00 p.m.

"LAZARUS," a "mood" story on the theme of man's fear of death, by the noted Russian writer, Andreyev, will be presented by Nelson Olmsted in his series of *Story Dramas*

this Tuesday. NBC. 7:00 p.m.

### Wednesday, April 2

THE WORLD EMERGENCY COMMITTEE of the Y.W.C.A. will hold a special lunch at the Waldorf-Astoria hotel in New York this Wednesday. Speakers will be Lady Halifax, wife of the new British ambassador to the United States; Claire Booth, playwright (writer of *Kiss the Boys Goodbye*); and Mrs. Maurice T. Moore, head of the World Emergency Committee. NBC. Time Not Available.

BOYS TOWN and Father Flanagan, founder of the famous community, will be honored with a luncheon this Wednesday at the M-G-M studios in Hollywood, signaling the completion of the new film, *Men of Boys Town*. At the luncheon ceremonies, which will be aired, will be Father Flanagan; Rev. James H. Ryan, Bishop of Omaha; Spencer Tracy, who plays the part of Father Flanagan; Mickey Rooney, who plays the mayor of Boys Town; and singer-actress Judy Garland. NBC. 1:15 p.m.

### Thursday, April 3

DON AMECHE will again be heard on *Kraft Music Hall* this Thursday. NBC. 6:00 p.m.

JOE E. BROWN, big-mouthed comedian who used to play professional baseball and is still close to the game as a fan and a promoter, will do a skit about a baseball rookie when he visits Rudy Vallee and John Barrymore this Thursday night. NBC. 7:00 p.m.

PROFESSOR QUIZ effective this week moves from Tuesday to Thursday, as prematurely announced several weeks ago. CBS. 7:15 p.m.

### Friday, April 4

THE KATE SMITH HOUR will spotlight dramatic excerpts from *The Roundup*, new film starring Richard Dix, Preston Foster and Patricia Morrison, who will all three appear in the radio sketch. The story is a romantic melodrama against a background of Indian trouble and gun running, the kind in which Richard Dix used to thrill you. CBS. 9:00 p.m.

HOLLYWOOD PREMIERES, Luella Parsons' new show, will present Paulette Goddard in a radio version of the film version of the radio program called *Pot 'o' Gold*. Miss Goddard is one of the stars of the new motion picture based on Horace Heidt's sensational radio show. CBS. 7:00 p.m.♫





## 'Sing It Again' emulates 'Stop the Music'

**I**T ISN'T ALWAYS TRUE that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. Sometimes, as when radio networks were in fierce competition for Hooperatings and sponsors, imitation was used as a tactical weapon. In the spring of 1948, after the nascent ABC network unveiled *Stop the Music*, other networks were forced to take notice. NBC took notice because *Stop the Music* was airing directly opposite Fred Allen and suddenly Allen's ratings were tumbling.

Over at CBS, William Paley was always on the lookout for ways to lure audiences away from rival networks, particularly NBC. The year 1948 would prove an ambitious one for Paley who would soon undertake another of his talent raids aimed at NBC. Paley also took note of the remarkable popularity of *Stop the Music* and personally orchestrated CBS's answer, *Sing it Again*. Under Paley's direction, CBS opened its coffers to *Sing it Again*. Premiering on May 29, 1948, just two months after *Stop the Music* debuted, the program was hosted by Dan Seymour, a veteran radio host. The National Academy of Vocal Arts once described Seymour as having the "friendliest voice" in the world. Some of the best musical performers of the day were regulars on the series, including Alan Dale, Bob Howard and Eugenie Baird. Ray Bloch and his orchestra handled the music. *Sing it Again* broadcast live before an audience of 1400 from CBS Radio Theatre 3 in New York; tickets were regularly in high demand.

During the hour-long production, operators would call between 11 and 13 people selected randomly from telephone books across the country. When Dan Seymour connected with a live person at the end of the phone line, the contestant would listen to a popular tune being sung by one of the program's professional singers. Next, the contestant would listen to a parody of the same tune. The parody would reference a person, place or thing. The callee was then asked to guess to whom or what the parody referenced. If the contestants guessed correctly they would listen to a jingle recorded by some familiar personality. If they were lucky enough to answer correctly, they would typically win a jackpot of prizes. The final step in the process was a question about that famous personality. A successful answer to that question would result in a cash prize of \$25,000.

On June 25, 1949, the phone unexpectedly rang for Rush Clarke of Rochester, NY. Clarke had been

forced to give up his job as a sales engineer the previous year because of a heart attack. Clarke correctly answered the parody question. When he guessed the swimmer, Gertrude Ederle, Clarke was told he had just won \$27,000 in merchandise. Trying for \$25,000 in cash, Clarke was asked to guess within 30 minutes the

time it took Ederle to swim the English Channel on her historic feat. Coming within 29 minutes of the actual time, Clarke collected the cash prize and hung up the phone a happy man.

Winning *Sing It Again* didn't always turn out to be the blessing it initially seemed as Bronx housewife Helen Co-

hen attested to in *Radio Mirror* (February 1950).

When she took that fateful call from Dan Seymour she was dumbfounded and excited. First, Mrs. Cohen was asked to listen to Alan Dale sing a parody song and guess the country alluded to in the lyrics. After guessing Switzerland, Mrs. Cohen was now eligible for a long list of prizes read off by Seymour. The Phantom Voice sang his song and Mrs. Cohen guessed Harold Lloyd. Euphoria erupted in the Cohen flat when it was announced that Helen had just won the \$28,000 jackpot of prizes. Unfortunately, she failed to correctly answer the cash prize question. Many of the prizes were not applicable to the Cohen family living in a four room flat in the Bronx, four flights up. To satisfy the projected \$6000 tax bill on their winnings the Cohens consulted a lawyer and consigned most of the prizes to an auction house.

*Sing It Again* seemed to be doing well enough on radio to warrant its move to television. The decision was made by CBS to simulcast the series beginning with the October 7, 1950, broadcast. Some changes were quickly evident. Economics came into play and some of the original cast members were let go. Dan Seymour remained as host. Alan Dale was retained as the principal singer; however, illness would sideline him for part of the season. The prizes were cut drastically to \$10,000 in merchandise and \$5,000 in cash. Seymour departed in February 1951 and comedian Jan Murray was hired to add some levity to the show. The changes were counterproductive, impressing neither listeners nor viewers. The swan song for *Sing It Again* occurred on the June 23, 1951, simulcast when both the radio and television formats faded from view.👤



**EDITOR'S NOTE.** Just to clarify, the Dan Seymour mentioned here, (right), radio's Dan Seymour, whom the National Academy of Vocal Arts described as the emcee with the "friendliest voice," is not the same Dan Seymour (left) of films and television. The film Dan Seymour is well recognized as a villainous heavy but he is best known, perhaps, as Abdul, the doorman at Rick's Café, in *Casablanca*.





# Saving Private Radio CONTINUED



**PHOTO 1:** The K-A-B EQS MK12. Twelve equalization curves accommodate records from early acoustics through RIAA stereophonic discs. Adjustable cartridge loading, lateral-vertical switching, and a processor loop add to the unit's flexibility.



**PHOTO 2:** Rear panel of the EQS MK12. The ¼" jacks on the left are fully-balanced, tip-ring-sleeve outputs. RCA connectors are gold-plated and Teflon®-insulated. The jacks marked "Return 1" are actually the line inputs, which are placed ahead of the equalization circuits.

Advertising illustration for the KAB EQS MK12, a chronologic equalizer used by many preservationists to adjust frequencies to achieve the best possible sound from the discs.

was recorded using the old National Association of Broadcasters, or NAB, curve is not going to accurately reproduce the audio on the disc. To make matters worse, every record company had its own curves,

and these curves would change from year to year. Thankfully, there are all sorts of equalization charts to be found on the internet. In general, for old-time radio, there are 12 basic curves. Transferring

a disc from 1930, for instance, might need to use the AES curve or the NAB curve. KAB's chronologic equalizer has integrated all 12 curves; merely push a button and get an instant setting followed by manually adjusting if necessary until the sound is just right. By using equalization preservationists have accurately reproduced and preserved the original sound as it was meant to be heard.

**THE FIFTH AND FINAL FACTOR** to creating quality transfers is a love for and dedication to OTR itself. A person who really loves old radio programs, who loves preserving audio, is going to take extra care to get things right.

Organizations such as SPERDVAC and Radio Archives love what they do, and their preservationists strive to do everything right. Over the years their methods have been noted and copied by collectors and hobbyists. Our thanks to these organizations for being true pioneers in the modern method of transferring transcription discs.

We appreciate you.🎧



## BEFORE COMPUTERS THERE WAS RADIO!

And the best place to learn all about the golden age or radio is *Radiogram*. Don't miss a single issue of *Radiogram*. Check the back of your *Radiogram* for your membership number and renewal date. You can also give this to your friends who

don't use a computer so they can join. New Members can just write the word *NEW* in the Member Number area. You can always renew your basic membership at [www.sperdvac.com](http://www.sperdvac.com) using PayPal, but you don't need a computer to be a member of SPERDVAC. Use this form and mail a check to SPERDVAC for \$20.00 to:

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