

RADIO LAFFS WITH GEORGE BURNS AND GRACIE ALLEN • THE WAY THE FUTURE WAS • TED LEWIS



*sperdvac*

# **RADIOGRAM**

Volume 47 • Number 1

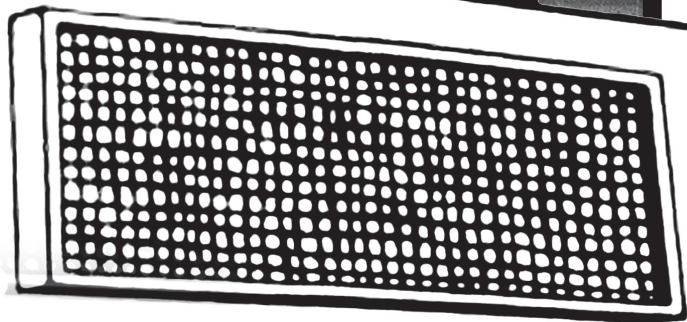
November/December 2023

# HUMMERT



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## from the president

### MY FELLOW SPERDVAC MEMBERS,

**A**S WE APPROACH the year's end, a time of reflection and gratitude, I find myself marveling at how swiftly time has flown by. It seems only moments ago that we were gearing up for Thanksgiving, and now, as you read this, it's nearly a fortnight behind us. The holiday season, adorned with its celebrations, prompts us to not only celebrate our victories but also to remember those we've lost. In honor of the dearly departed among our SPERDVAC family, we're initiating an "In Memoriam" segment in upcoming editions of *Radiogram* and on our website—a tribute to their lasting impact on our community.

You may have noticed our "Friends of SPERDVAC" donation page needs updating. Rest assured, in 2024, it will accurately reflect the most recent contributions. It's heartening to witness donations in the names of our members and luminaries who've shaped our organization profoundly.

Now, about *Radiogram*. To adapt to the evolving landscape—rising postal fees, printing expenses, and more—we are transitioning to a bi-monthly distribution (that's six times a year). For our new members, this shift is a strategic response aimed at maintaining sustainability while delivering the excellence you've come to expect from us. Some have inquired about returning to our previous eleven-time-a-year distribution. While the future remains uncertain, our board of directors is dedicated to finding the equilibrium between our aspirations and practicality.

Let's rewind the calendar to recall our inaugural Virtual Convention Halloween Weekend 2023. Kudos to Zach Eastman, our event producer, for orchestrating a truly memorable experience. The wealth of programs, panels, and glimpses from the SPERDVAC vault was a testament to our community's vibrancy. We were privileged to host a live interview with the esteemed director Greg Oppenheimer, and for those unable to join, fret not—highlights will soon grace our YouTube page. Please share your thoughts and suggestions at [info@spervac.com](mailto:info@spervac.com); your input

shapes our upcoming events, including more enthralling virtual evenings ahead.

Peering into 2024, expect unforeseen twists and turns. Technological strides, particularly in AI, have sparked both wonder and concern among our Writer's Guild and SAG/AFTRA. The fusion of Frank Sinatra's voice with Michael Jackson's "Billie Jean" through AI is a testament to these advancements. Take a listen and weigh in—it's a glimpse into the vast opportunities this technology unveils for our organization.

A revelation from Corey Harker, our newly appointed Director of Acquisitions and Restoration, underscores the importance of not solely relying on the convenience of digital formats for longevity. Surprisingly, vinyl emerged as the superior medium for preserving recordings—offering unparalleled sound quality. As my grandfather used to remark, "I've been hearing about progress all my life but we still dig holes with shovels." The essence of our timeless treasures owes its gratitude to the tireless efforts of audio engineers from yesteryears.

As we bid adieu to this year, let's embrace the uncharted territories of the coming one. Our journey continues, enriched by our shared passions and the enduring legacy of our cherished members. Here's to a future where the echoes of the past resonate vibrantly through the strides we take today.

Until next time, stay safe and stay tuned.📻

*Timothy Knofler*





## A Major Correction and a New Adventure

**WE STRIVE FOR ACCURACY** here at *Radiogram* but we don't always succeed. In our past issue's tribute to *Broadway Is My Beat*, the author—someone I know quite well—bungled a few facts that need correction if only for the sake of, well, accuracy. Rather than itemize each failure ourselves we'll let OTR researcher, historian and author Karl Schadow emend the article for us. Thus:

- Peter Lyon (then along with his wife) and later Joseph Ruscoll were the initial script writers when the series debuted in New York.

- When the program moved to Hollywood in July 1949, the producer/director was Gordon T. Hughes (later Cliff Howell) and not Elliott Lewis. It wasn't until November 5, 1949, that Lewis became the program's helmsman. In July 1949, Morton Fine and David Friedkin were enlisted as the script co-authors.

- As to the music, Robert Stringer was the composer and conductor for that initial New York season only. During the summer of 1949 when the program moved to Hollywood, Lud Gluskin was the music director who incorporated a different theme and incidental music. When Elliott Lewis came onboard in November 1949, he utilized the "Manhattan" theme by Rodgers & Hart, which debuted in the 1925 Revue *Garrick Gaieties*. Both Alexander Courage and Wilbur Hatch were then interchanged for the music, sometimes credited separately, other occasions together on the same broadcast.

- [And for clarification], the detectives [in *The Naked City*] were played by Barry Fitzgerald and Don Taylor. Howard Duff was Frank Niles, a merchandising consultant and a chief suspect in the case.

- In researching *Broadway Is My Beat*, I believe one can classify the series into three distinct eras: 1) New York, 2) Hollywood—Summer 1949) Hollywood - November 1949 to the end in 1954. The third era could also be divided into a couple of subsections.

Thank you, Karl. We are humbled yet pleased to set the record straight regarding

this fine radio program, which, as Karl mentioned in correspondence, deserves much more research and praise as a supreme example of what can be described as "radio noir."

One more point. The article noted that one Lester Gottlieb, as spelled in the article with a single *t*, was producer for the New York series. Hmm, I wonder where that came from; according to Karl there is no record to date of one Lester Gottlieb—with or without two *ts*—associated with *Broadway Is My Beat*. One Lester Gottlieb—two *ts*—is associated with musical programs and in 1939 in a trade publication he is described as a publicist for the Mutual network. But no mention in any capacity with *Broadway Is My Beat*.

Now, for an article that praises *Broadway Is My Beat* as an excellent example of the police procedural it sure fell flat-footed when it came to "just the facts." What happened? We reached out to the author, and we nabbed him while he was sleeping on a park bench under a *Radiogram* comforter for a response. He was eager to save face but all we could get out of him was thus: "Uh, well, Larry Thor was a CBS announcer; and, well, uh, Mr. Gottlieb is in my 30-year-old notes when researching the police procedural as 'NY producer.' I didn't make it up so I must have found that name mistakenly associated with the show during a microfilm search and ran with it. So there!"

The author offered us a raspberry of the audio variety before returning to his broad beat on skid row.

Before he faded under a street lamp, though, we heard him mumble, "There are at least eight million idiots in this bare city and

these guys have to pick on this one."

Seriously, folks, if you haven't heard an episode of *Broadway Is My Beat* you need to. Our recommendation is to listen to the Thor-Lewis-Morton-Fine episodes; for our ha'penny they never fail to please.

...

**W**ITH THE NEW YEAR *Radiogram* embarks on a new publication schedule. We become bi-monthly, which is journalism lingo for every other month not twice-per-month. This begins in January with a date of January/February 2024. You should receive your copy at the beginning of February.

What does that mean for you? Not much other than you will receive fewer issues. At this time we will continue with 16-pages (maybe some of you remember when *Radiogram* was four pages). The president's message will continue as will our regular visit by the Mysterious Traveler; this column, as irregular as the author, will continue. Best of all, we'll continue with fine articles about radio's golden age as well as today's aural drama where we can find it. And in all probability we'll stumble and offer a few inaccuracies and will eagerly await correction.

Why the change? Why else but what other organizations face: the high cost of living. Although our publication costs have remained reasonable the costs nonetheless have increased, particularly the cost of paper. Worse, the cost of postage has skyrocketed. A couple of years ago we dropped first-class postage—a staple of membership for years—to opt for fourth-class rate to keep costs down, but the post office has no ceiling—*up, up, and away!*

These high costs necessitated a change and we asked you to help us decide what to do. You responded, and our poll indicated that you prefer a printed *Radiogram* at bi-monthly intervals.

...

**W**HAT'S THE DEAL with that all-color online edition of the July Lone Ranger issue? The print edition was spot color. Is there now a better deal online?

No. The online edition was special to celebrate the Lone Ranger's 90th birthday and was also an experiment in color.

We wish we could afford all-color for *Radiogram* but, alas . . . money, money, money.

We'd need a wealthy patron—*please!* 🍷



Atlantic City Press • March 10, 1950



### George BURNS AND Gracie ALLEN

George: Did you ever dream you were out with me?

Gracie: Oh no—I never have nightmares.

George: Why don't you dream you went to the Brown Derby with me?

Gracie: Oh, no! I had to stand up in bed two hours last night waiting for a table!

Gracie: I even remember the day I was born. And I'll never forget the surprised look on the doctor's face when I looked up and said: "Doctor, what am I? A boy or a girl?"

George: On the day you were born you looked up at the doctor and said: "Am I a boy or a girl?"

Gracie: Yeah.

George: And what did the doctor say?

Gracie: The doctor looked down, and he said: "Little baby, what else could you be?"

Gracie: My uncle jumped out of a 16-story window.

George: Why? How come?

Gracie: He was supposed to jump out of a 30-story window but he lost his nerve.

George: Was he hurt?

Gracie: We don't know. He's still unconscious and can't tell us. And my aunt fell downstairs with two quarts of liquor.

George: Did she spill it?

Gracie: No, she kept her mouth shut.

Gracie: I used to have a sweetheart. He was a southeast mounted policeman.

George: You mean a *northwest* mounted policeman.

Gracie: No, southwest. He was cross-eyed.

George: Is anybody in your family as smart as you?

Gracie: Yeah, my sister.

George: Sort of a half-wit?

Gracie: Yeah, she's married; she's been married for five years and she's still in love.

George: I'm glad to hear that.

Gracie: Yeah, but her husband has no idea who the fellow is.



## SPERDVAC ELECTION RULES

The Election Chair will be appointed by the President. The Chair will see that a notice of election is in the November-December issue of the *SPERDVAC Radiogram*, [SPERDVAC.com](http://SPERDVAC.com), and/or email notification. A copy of the election rules will also appear in the same issue.

Members wishing to run in the election for the Board of Directors must declare their candidacy and submit a candidate statement to the Election Chair by Saturday, January 13, 2024.

In order to be a candidate for election, a candidate must be a member in good standing and be able to meet the requirements and fiduciary duties of a SPERDVAC board member. Candidate statements shall be limited to 200 words and must be received by the election chair by 11:59 p.m., Saturday, January 13, 2024.

The current board will review the candidates and their statements, determine their suitability for election, and certify the nominees for the election ballot.

Ballots with the candidate statements will be mailed or electronically sent to each member who is in good standing and eligible to vote by the first weekend in February. The members must return their ballots or complete their electronic entry to the election chair by Friday, March 8, 2024.

Ballots must be created and handled, whether physical or electronic, in a fashion that insures one member, one vote.

The Election Chair is responsible for coordinating, conducting the election, counting the votes, and certifying the election.

The results, which include the exact count of the voters for each candidate, will be communicated prior to on the March Board meeting and will be published in the April newsletter or on the website. Candidates suitable for election must have received at least 10% of the votes counted.

For the election to be valid, the minimum number of members voting for a quorum must be at least 5% of the membership whose dues are current and are eligible to vote. If there is not the necessary number of ballots for a quorum, the Election Chair will conduct a second election by the second Saturday in April. They shall be counted at the May meeting.

Ballots shall be maintained by the Election Chair for a period of one year and the results should remain permanently with the corporate records.

# THE WAY THE FUTURE WAS



by  
Irvin S. Cobb

A THRILLING VISION OF RADIO'S FUTURE

It is fraught with golden possibilities—radio's tomorrow.

A universal language, international sympathy and an eternal peace pact

**THINK** I have the best job at present, most of us think of the radio in terms of its value as an advertising medium, as an entertainment medium, and perhaps, incidentally, of its educational value. I am of the opinion—and probably I am as faulty in my prognostications as the average prophet is—that the possibilities of the radio as a force of creating world opinion and shaping the destinies of civilized mankind have not yet been appreciated even by those controlling this huge machinery for the dissemination of words and ideas.

So far as I am able to figure the ground here scarcely has been scratched. Political campaigns, advocates of one side or another use the microphone for broadcasting their dogmas. Through this source preachers already deliver their sermons to audiences measured by the millions rather than by the hundreds or the thousands. And, occasionally, some statesman presents his views on a continental network or a trans-oceanic hookup. The thing is still so new that we stand marveling to think that one man's voice should, by this magic, be sent across thousands of miles and into the homes of countless listeners.

But, as I see it, this merely is the puny beginning of a mechanism more gigantic than the most optimistic of radio sponsors or program producers have conceived. I firmly believe that the day is not far distant when it will come to pass that the greatest intellects of the world will be banded together, irrespective of race, or color, in some form of universe-wide organization for the education of our youth, the teachings of moral and ethical principles, and, most of all, for the cause of world understanding and world peace.

I see the schoolhouse of the future as a place where the teacher will be to all intents and purposes a monitor, charged with the responsibility of inculcating discipline and setting an example in good manners to her pupils. Her classroom will be a combination of moving picture theatre, radio reception room and television studio. No longer will the teacher, who may be dull or inexpert, carry

the burden of instructing the youth of the land from dusty blackboards or through tedious textbooks. Instead, each day, over the air will come to the youth the voice of some really great educator, some outstanding authority on this or that subject, and while this voice speaks, television will reproduce before the eyes of those young people the perfect counterfeit of the man or the woman whose voice they are hearing. In the same equation, the moving picture machine will participate.

Let us assume, for example, that the subject of the hour is the World War. Projected on the screen will be actual photographs to illustrate what the historian is describing. So that, through the guise of thrilling entertainment, facts and figures and details will be impressed upon the sensitive plates of juvenile understanding in a way so graphic and so lifelike that the subject matter will remain definitely recorded in the scholar's brain. His imagination will be stirred, his sense of drama will be quickened, his enthusiasm will be aroused by the power and personality of the man or the woman who, simultaneously with the visual accessories, is telling him what happened, and how it happened, and why it happened.

Now take the church! I can see that it is entirely possible and plausible that the average small-town clergyman of the future will conduct the ritualistic side of service and that when the moment comes for the sermon, the congregation will see and hear some illustrious spiritual leader as he delivers his message, not only to the group in this particular church, but to the groups gathered in countless similar places all over the country. The day of dreary sermonizing will have passed. The era of stodgy, uninspired puppeteering will be as obsolete as the high-wheeled bicycle and the flintlock musket. Instead the finest thought and the noblest eloquence of the greatest moral teachers in the land will be leaving its impress upon the hearts and souls of 10 millions of thrilled auditors all at once.

And now, then, for the most important premise of this prediction of mine. I believe most firmly that, as a result of the widespread use of radio with television for the dis-

tribution of thought, we will have a universal language, simple, easily acquired, and readily understood. I believe that the nations of this world will be eager to learn this language and when it is learned, when the masses all around the globe are acquainted with this form of cosmic communication, the greatest imaginable step toward world peace will have been taken and the mightiest medium for friendly understanding that mankind has ever known, or perhaps ever shall know, will have become an accomplished fact.

Let us assume that this fact has been accomplished and that this universal language is being generally used. Suppose, then, that hostilities are threatened between two neighboring lands. No longer will the lives and the fortunes of the peoples of those two lands be in the hands of professional sword-rattlers, or scheming politicians, or greedy financiers, or ruthless dictators. For then it will be possible for the chosen mouthpieces of one nation to tell the people of the neighboring nation exactly what they feel, and what they desire, and what the merits of their own case is, and what the will, not of the politicians and the self-appointed rulers and leaders, but of the common man and woman of that country is. By this means, it will be possible for the ordinary citizens of the countries in question to sense the viewpoint and feel the goodwill of their fellow beings across the national boundaries. And, by the same token, it will become increasingly difficult for reckless leadership to drive either nation or both into an avowal of open hostilities. For if you understand the other fellow you are not so apt to come to blows with him.

In other words, I suggest the supposition that the radio, plus the universal tongue, plus television, will eventually do more for the cause of peace on earth, goodwill to all men, than all the anti-war societies have ever done or ever could hope to do.

So I am seeing the radio, not only as an entertainment agency, but as an all-powerful engine for the education of our children, for the moral betterment of our adults, and, for far fewer wars and more harmony on the face of this globe.📻

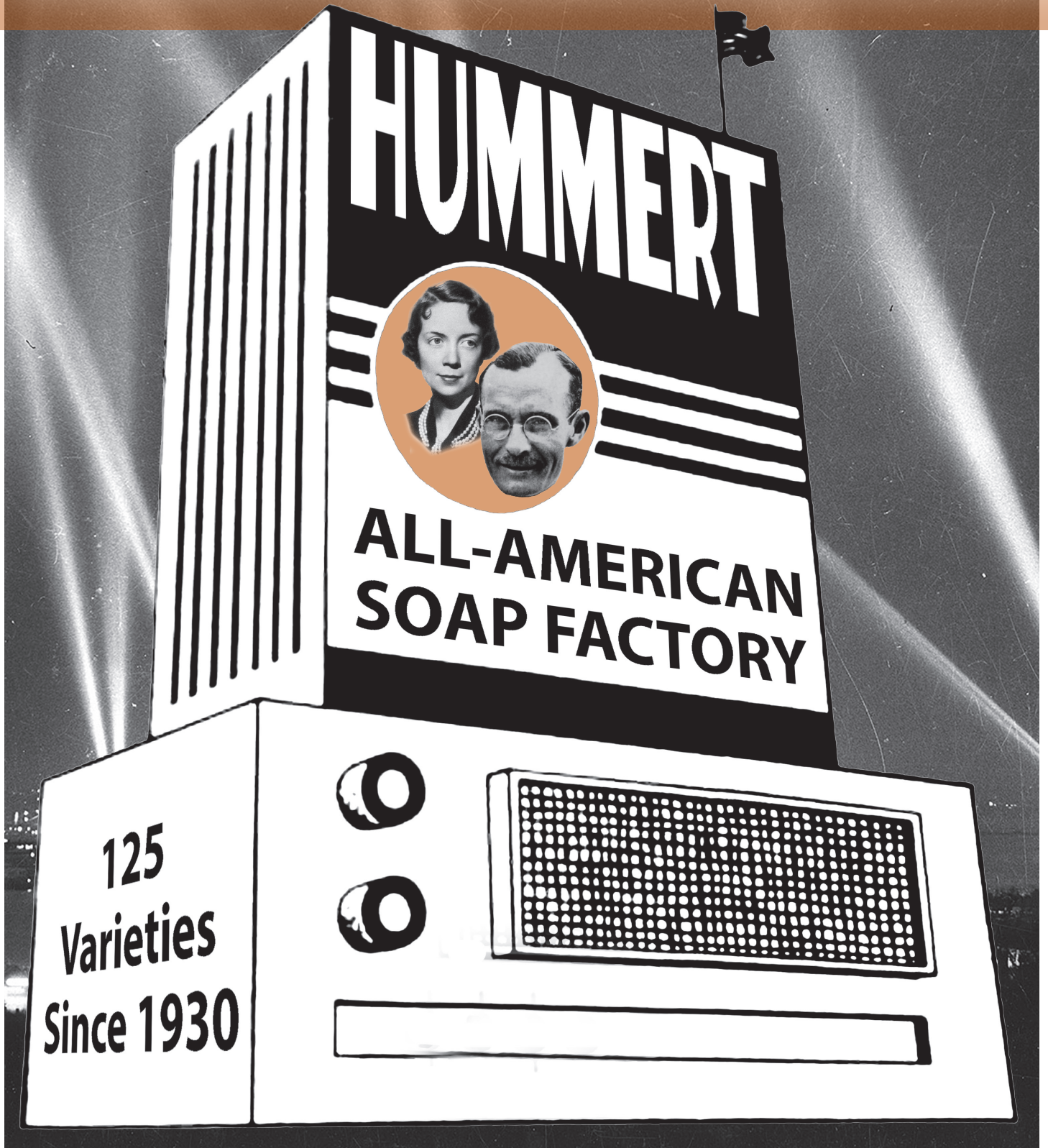
This insight into the future of radio by humorist Irvin S. Cobb first appeared in the January 1931 edition of *Radio Stars*. The accompanying illustration by Roy Simms offered a caption that summarized the article: "The God of War himself may—who knows?—succumb to the power of radio. The famous Mr. Cobb hints at amazing possibilities."







**america's most humorous couple**





# ouple who were never on the air

## Radio's Prolific and Peculiar Producers . . . *the Hummerts*

by Jim Cox

**W**ITH ECCENTRICITIES TO A FAULT Frank and Anne Hummert sallied forth to create as many as 129 series for the aural ether between the 1930s and 1960s. Their colossal feature stockpile embraced mystery, music, juvenile fiction, and soap opera, the latter bundle providing unhampered supremacy that labeled them “the moguls of matinee.”

**B**EYOND teeming contributions to radio the Hummerts were commonly recognized for some inescapable idiosyncrasies that kept them at odds with competitive creators. Their many series were characterized by foibles that appeared to have little place in storylines yet netted giggles galore and steady outbursts of uncontrollable laughter from listeners. The pair's steadfast edicts were handed down to hundreds of minions toiling for nominal wages in an assembly-line factory. Violations of any sacrosanct directives weren't tolerated. The duo's curiously bizarre quirks were never tampered with. Anyone misconstruing their pronouncements was soon seeking employment elsewhere. And from their ultimatums unanticipated mirth that tickled America's funny bone invariably spilled from the mouths of their recurring fans.

This treatise will expose some of those distinctive traits that separated Hummert scripts from their more solemn artifact-producing competitors. Before that let's take a fleeting look at the lives of the inscrutable principals.

### IN THE WRITE LANE

**F**RANK HUMMERT was a native of St. Louis, born June 2, 1884. He lived to March 12, 1966, 82 years. He matured in a bilingual home—his mother was French, his father English. That and his dad's livelihood as a European importer saw the family living on the Continent at times. This may have amplified his pursuit of public media as a vocation. Increasingly he held solid posts in journalism, advertising, marketing, and broadcasting. Eventually he became creative director and vice president of the Midwest's most prestigious advertising agency, Blackett and Sample. His name was added to the masthead of Blackett-Sample-Hummert. Leaving it in 1943 he launched his own Chicago agency, moving it to New York three years later.

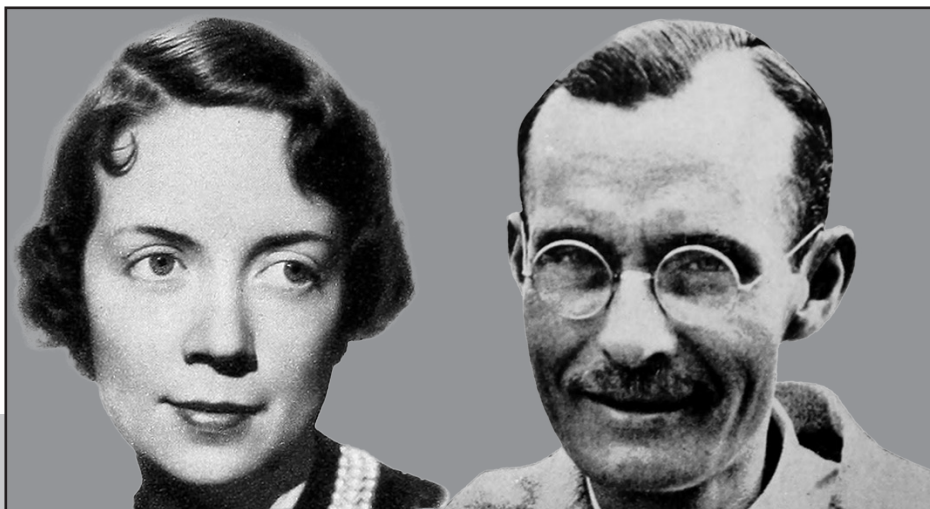
In his personal life in 1908 Hummert wed a St. Louis girl, Adeline Woodlock. Both were 24. The couple never had children. We don't know a cause of death for Adeline shortly after 1930 but Frank became a widower. In 1935 he married an ambitious journalist, divorcée Anne Shumacher Ashenhurst, with a small son. By court decree the boy ultimately resided with his father, approved by Anne. Frank and Anne never had progeny.

In 1930 she joined Blackett-Sample-Hummert as Hummert's editorial assistant. Her drive, talent, and efficiency netted her VP status within two years. A year later she was a full partner.

Anne Schumacher was born Jan. 19, 1905, in Baltimore and was Frank Hummert's junior by two decades. She had a successful run as a newspaper reporter in Baltimore and Paris before meeting Hummert. Her death at 91 on July 5, 1996 saw her outlive her spouse by three decades.

Frank and Anne Hummerts' contributions to network radio were so immense that no one approached the multitude of series they developed. Seeking to satisfy just about any listener's tastes, the couple offered features in juvenile adventure, music, mystery, news, advice, games, sports, situation comedy, and a seemingly inexhaustible province of soap opera. So firm was the Hummerts' grip on matinée melodrama with 61 creations that in the 1940s they controlled four-and-a-half hours of national weekday broadcasts. In the sunshine hours they were responsible for generating more than half the revenues billed by four coast-to-coast chains. At their peak the couple aired 18 quarter-hour serials five times weekly, 90 original episodes 52 weeks annually, with none repeated.

In addition to their dominance of washboard weepers, at night and on weekends Frank and Anne Hummert supplied the airwaves with several more sterling entries. At one point they filled broadcast schedules with 25 to 30 hours every week. No one surpassed their creative multiplicity. For about 27 years the



Anne and Frank Hummert, the rather eccentric creators and producers of myriad radio shows during the golden age of broadcasting.

Hummerts unequivocally ruled the roost.

Despite their extensive business acumen, in private life the pair exhibited a colossal bent for reclusive, puritanical, eccentric, parsimonious, ostentatious predilections. This marked them as two of the most inscrutable active broadcasters. To dub them radio's "Odd Couple" would not be stretching the point.

Let's get to the good stuff, the perplexing habits that caused them to gain legendary status among radio professionals. While they were recognized for putting the most series on the air, their methods of conducting an outfit reaped fame that wouldn't have been acceptable to many of their rivals.

One source hinted that the Hummerts' personal inhibitions substantially added to the nonconformities in the business empire over which they presided.

A flagrantly callous disregard for others, at times bordering on disdain (and often surprisingly aimed at those in their employ who were helping make them wealthy) possibly overshadowed every other curious quirk they exhibited. Their seeming coldness toward the cares and concerns of others branded them as insensitive snobs and social outcasts. Yet

if any of it ever bothered them, neither one let on.

Some examples of the pair's culinary penchants offer rich detail, implying that their oddball behavior began at home.

#### TABLE MATTERS

AT THE INCEPTION of one of their serials, *Chaplain Jim*, in 1942, the Hummerts told actor Ed Kirby in the namesake role that following the debut-

ing broadcast they would like to take him and his wife to dinner. Marjorie Kirby wondered to her spouse if they might be guests at New York's posh Club 21 or the Stork Club. The four-some's transfer to dinner was conveyed by horse and buggy "to avoid gas rationing," Frank

Hummert explained. Driven to the producers' elegant nearby Fifth Avenue apartment, the visitors were ushered on a tour of the impressive grand domicile by its residents. As they entered a room Frank turned on the lights while Anne followed, turning off the lights as they departed each one. For dinner, eating in the kitchen, Frank unsealed a can of Campbell's vegetable soup as Anne opened a can of peaches, pouring them onto a bed

of lettuce. "I hope you don't mind if the cake has been here a little while," she allowed. "It's still good though."

Mealtimes perpetuated the power couple's eccentricities. Typically, the furtive twosome lunched at a sophisticated bistro in the Park Lane Hotel at 299 Park Avenue a few steps from their offices at 247 Park Avenue in midtown Manhattan. The pair preferred to conceal themselves behind bulky fern planters—all the while capable of observing others but determined not to be seen. They shunned the spotlight and rarely granted interviews. And if any of their subordinates violated an order barring interviews, dismissal followed.

Another reference to their eating habits offers additional fodder. In later years, when the Hummerts owned an ostentatious estate in Greenwich, CT, a revelation came out after a colleague's summons to their majestic French Colonial manor occurred at feeding time. He witnessed the pair seated at opposite ends of a prolonged dining table in a formal dining room. Japanese servants scurried end to end bearing entrée platters, bowls of vegetables, bread plates, and condiments. It was a departure from the norm but typically in vogue for the odd couple.

Lead actors and others appearing in the casts of their multiplicity of broadcast wares had few, if any, exchanges with the couple hiring them. Instead, when the Hummerts selected parties for their dramas, a confidential lawyer in their employ shoved a contract in front of an individual. It stated the parameters of their hiring, expectations and limitations of their employment (including what they could not do), and a fee over which there was no debate. The contract was accepted or rejected by an applicant with the statutes and recompense outlined. Pay rates were usually below those of rival producers. A mitigating factor was that the Hummerts had so many shows on the air that—if an actor, announcer, author, or director was deemed worthy—he or she could be awarded multiple shows, potentially increasing an income significantly.

#### SHORT ON TIME

AT THE SAME TIME Ms. Hummert notoriously informed one underling: "I

Despite their extensive business acumen, in private life the pair exhibited a colossal bent for reclusive, puritanical, eccentric, parsimonious, ostentatious predilections.



shall only call you once. That will be to tell you that I no longer need your services.” Miscreant thespians lived in fear of ringing telephones. Serial heroine Mary Jane Higby affirmed that, “Any actor who was five minutes late to a Hummert rehearsal was in trouble. There would be a message to ‘call the office as soon as you get off the air.’ In compliance the receiver would burn an actor’s ear. If it happened again, termination was quick.”

One source insisted that—by her very nature—Anne Hummert had the ability to instill the fear of the Lord in her dialogues. A widely circulated anecdote noted that on one occasion Ms. Hummert instructed Manya Starr, one of her nameless hacks, to “include God on every page of every script.” To which the well-intentioned wordsmith inquired: “And who will play the part?” Ms. Hummert

fired the scriptwriter on the spot.

Frank could also display a mean streak. Once, when a subordinate addressed him as both he and Hummert attended to business in the men’s room, Frank—forever guarding his own privacy—fired the man right there. Seasoned staffers learned that it was best to tiptoe around Frank rather than engage him in conversation.

“Most of our listeners believe these stories are real” Frank and Anne said of the copious narratives they put on the air. They insisted that identifying their authors and actors by name “would spoil the illusion” for millions of fans. This decision provided cover for failing to credit the laborers in their trenches, adding to the secrecy surrounding the owners. Yet they took personal credit for authorship on many of their shows that were derived

by countless minions.

## ODDBALL OPPORTUNISTS

WHILE THE HUMMERTS owned a stable of strong music and juvenile adventure programming, in their dramatic series—including soap opera and detective mysteries—their peculiarities became more pronounced and readily recognized by faithful audiences. One of their chief trademarks in dramatic features required clear separation of who was speaking and who was listening, to endless repetitious distraction. The Hummerts wouldn’t tolerate extraneous conversation, music, sound effects, or other din that would compete with a script’s dialogue. As lines were being read aloud sometimes hilarious outcomes prevailed for a snickering audience. Here’s a typical example from



**Assembly line** ■ Sparsely furnished studio, mike and script were only gear needed for bigtime production when radio serials were at their peak. With shows coming off production line like

cars (but at higher profit per unit), rehearsals were short. Frank Hummert (far right) and wife, Anne, operated one of the biggest soap opera factories. Others in picture are unidentified.

Photo and caption taken from the August 22, 1960, edition of *Broadcasting* illustrates the waning appeal of radio’s soap operas.



an exchange on a *Mr. Keen, Tracer of Lost Persons* installment as a character named Paul Benningham approached the great investigator:

“Mr. Keen, my business partner, Ralph Dunaway, who was murdered two nights ago and was my wife Mabel’s first cousin, wasn’t all that good at keeping financial records. I took much of that off him for our firm. But through an inheritance, he controlled the assets of some securities

destined to pay handsome dividends in time not only to himself and his wife, Alice Dunaway, and their children Polly Morgan and William Dunaway, but also to my wife, Mable Benningham, and another cousin, Mildred Roscoe.”

Mr. Keen responded: “Well, Paul Benningham, your summation is fascinating. I will ask my partner here, Mike Clancy, to look into your business partner Ralph Dunaway’s public records. We might find something illuminating there that will reveal the methods he used in conducting his business affairs.”

Paul Benningham replied: “Thank you, Mr. Keen. I’m sure Alice Dunaway, wife of the deceased Ralph Dunaway, their offspring Polly Morgan and William Dunaway, as well as my wife, Mable Benningham, and her surviving cousin, Mildred Roscoe, will be grateful for your help.”

Laughable and ludicrous! You bet. Yet that was not out of the ordinary for a Hummert narrative.

There were other incidents that were just as funny. The Hummerts loved to saddle their detectives with dimwitted sidekicks who contributed little beyond providing someone for their protagonists to speak to. In the same *Mr. Keen* episodes, for example, a dumber-than-thou Irishman, Mike Clancy, offered little outside an occasional “Saints preserve us!” exclamation. But when the script rose to a fever pitch, Clancy made the startling revelation that anybody in the room could have witnessed after Keen fingered a cold-blooded killer: “Saints

preserve us, boss! He’s got a gun!” Millions of listeners must have held their sides as they rollicked over that one.

In *Hearthstone of the Death Squad* the famed inspector was burdened with detective Sam Cook, an incompetent boob

generating snickers by his inept ability to contribute much of anything. He was present to let “the great one” smell like a rose. In a Hummert drama there just wasn’t room for two brilliant gumshoes. In *Mr. Chameleon*, de-

detective Dave Arnold supplied the role of the deficient sidekick. Fans learned that these narratives followed much the same blueprint. They were drawn by chilling tales of the macabre, despite the comedy.

#### AS THE SOAP WAS DISPENSED


**T**HE HUMMERTS’ prolific dishpan dramas that were spread across four networks from morning to afternoon habitually pursued thin parameters and plots. Storylines took weeks if not months to resolve, moving at a slow pace so that—as critics observed—a listener could miss a few chapters and instantly catch up with what was happening because little *had* happened.

The backgrounds of these washboard weepers were similar. *Helen Trent* and *Young Widder Brown* kept suitors at bay, getting close to the altar numerous times but never saying “I do.” After decades, they still hadn’t wed when their final installments aired. *Our Gal Sunday* and *Backstage Wife* fended off scores of vixens determined to get their hooks into their respective husbands. *Just Plain Bill*, *Front Page Farrell*, and *David Harum* spent their careers tracking culprits who deceived America’s housewives and arranged murders to polish off their foes. Each protagonist could have easily joined the Hummert crime wave aired after dark. *Stella Dallas* and *Ma Perkins* were mamas refusing to let go of bewildering offspring. And *Lorenzo Jones*, yet another Hummert property, copied nighttime’s persistent inventor of useless stuff, Fib-

ber McGee. When the Hummerts latched on to a profitable model duplication allowed them to get blood from a turnip. And in many there was mirth aplenty, not merely drawing listeners’ interest to a tale itself but by putting smiles on faces as fans skeptically realized how farcical


**Frank and Anne’s personal excesses and idiosyncrasies turned up in all their many narratives, day and night. The duo maintained an exalted deference for sexual purity.**

**LISTEN TONIGHT  
TO  
WDAE**



**MR. CHAMELEON**

<b>Club 15</b>	<b>..... 7:30</b>
<b>Ed R. Murrow</b>	<b>..... 7:45</b>
<b>Mr. Chameleon</b>	<b>.... 8:00</b>
<b>Dr. Christian</b>	<b>..... 8:30</b>
<b>Guy Lombardo</b>	<b>..... 9:00</b>
<b>Boxing Bouts</b>	<b>..... 10:00</b>



**WDAE 1250**  
CBS NETWORK    ON YOUR DIAL  
WDAE-FM    100.7 MC

Advertisement from the Tampa (FL) Times (September 5, 1951) for *Mr. Chameleon*, master of disguise, one of the few mystery-detective radio programs produced by the Hummerts



## SAFE RADIO FOR KIDDIES

Mrs. Hummert Explains How Programs Are Checked by  
Psychologist Before Going on Air

WHEN Mrs. Anne Ashenhurst Hummert heard stories of children reduced to a state of nervous hysteria by the "blood and thunder" radio melodramas and heard mothers complaining that their small boys were glorifying and imitating the gangster heroes on the air and listened thoughtfully to maternal lamentations that children were adopting slang phrases used by radio characters, the pretty, dynamic young executive vice president of Blackett-Sample-Hummert Inc., decided that the situation, if true, should be remedied at once. Among the numerous radio shows she supervised for the agency were several children's programs, including *Skippy*.

"It occurred to me that only an expert in child psychology was qualified to judge what was harmful to children," she explains. "So I set out about three years ago to consult psychologists. I talked with at least 20 of them. I found they differed widely in their opinions. It seemed as though no two agreed. Practically no child psychologist at that time had made any detailed study of the influence of children's radio programs on children.

### The Discovery

"FINALLY, I discovered the man I was looking for. He was Dr. Arthur T. Jersild, of Columbia University. Unlike the others, who were largely theorizing, he had actually experimented and made tests which definitely showed the children's reactions. I had him pass on the *Skippy* program before we put it on the air."

Mrs. Hummert, who was Mrs. Ashenhurst before her marriage to Frank Hummert last fall, is credited with having been the pioneer in employing psychologists to inspect radio programs for children.

She started the practice about three years ago when a group of mothers in Scarsdale, New York, were protesting against the majority of children's program then on the air. Interviewed in her charmingly decorated Park Avenue office, she declared:

"Of course, they were a fairly small group, but they received lots of publicity. Furthermore, the movement spread and women in other communities took it up. I wanted to find out whether they were wholly right or partially right.

"I learned some interesting and helpful facts from my work with Dr. Jersild. One point was that the hyper-nervous child can't be taken as a measure for all children. The mother herself, knowing her child's temperament must decide as an individual matter what entertainment excites him unduly, and should be excluded.

"The average child wants adventure. This can be given to him without glorifying crime or gangsters. He can have the enjoyment of adventure, while still being given to understand definitely that the law is on the right side. After all, as he grows up, he will have to realize that a certain amount of opposition to the law or right is part of the world he lives in. It is not teaching him life and giving him the best training to fit himself



MRS. HUMMERT

for it, to shield him from that knowledge.

"Furthermore, I have always held that dramatic situations for children differ from those which appeal to adults. For instance, to a child the death of his dog is tremendously dramatic and vital. He can find as much drama in that situation as an adult might find in any amount of machine-gun shooting.

"We tried to keep drama and adventure in our programs while excluding the harmful elements. Whenever our child characters were in danger—whenever there was anxiety as to what might happen to them—we always had an adult beside them, to give our youthful listeners a feeling of security, even while they had the thrill of high adventure."

Mrs. Hummert, who has a nine-year-old son, has decided ideas about the use of slang by radio characters—one of the "evil influences" about which the Scarsdale mothers complained. "I am strongly opposed to having the characters talk like hoodlums," she confided. "Every mother knows how imitative children are. Certainly, she doesn't want her child to go around saying things like, 'Okie-doke', and 'Olive oil'. It's a reflection on her own character and ability to bring up her child properly.

"Of course, in our *Skippy* broadcasts, we had to include certain 'skippyisms' that were part and parcel of the personality created by the author of the newspaper strip, Percy Crosby. We did, however, avoid slang as much as possible.

"Whatever the plot of our drama might be, we stressed principles of character-building. The good qualities of honor, honesty, integrity, personal cleanliness and good manners were always emphasized. Children imitate good things as well as bad. Admiring the hero, they also admire the qualities he stands for."

Mrs. Hummert is in active charge of over 40 radio performances each week, including *Manhattan Merry-Go-Round*, *Hammerstein's Music Hall*, *Broadway Varieties* and an integral part of the popular Sunday evening feature, *American Album of Familiar Music*.

so much of it was.

Frank and Anne's personal excesses and idiosyncrasies turned up in all their many narratives, day and night. The duo maintained an exalted deference for sexual purity. Their modesty trolled unbelievable extremes, even on a day when chastity was highly prized. Helen Trent, the pundits' exceedingly respected "goddess of goodness," never pondered an immoral thought. Persistently she exhibited an unapproachable virtue that endowed her with a superiority never acquired by any other serial heroine. The Hummerts' interpretation of sex was patently inexperienced. On one occasion when a fiancé asked Helen if he could hold her hand, she snapped: "What do you think I am? A mere engagement ring doesn't buy such privileges!" Helen and her kind had a way of making a peck on the cheek appear as sexual excess.

The Hummerts displayed an often-exasperating accommodation for the bizarre, out-of-harmony quests in radio theatre. Yet because of their involvement to the extent they took it, radio's fortunes could often be capsulized in the enhancement they offered. Nobody came close to the number of features they aired; and no one rivaled them in influencing radio's outcomes for both daytime and nighttime programming. In much of it the twosome simply gained the last laugh.👁

### Selected Titles in the Hummert Universe

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| ■ <i>Alias Jimmy Valentine</i>            | ■ <i>Lorenzo Jones</i>                    |
| ■ <i>Amanda of Honeymoon Hill</i>         | ■ <i>Manhattan Merry-Go-Round</i>         |
| ■ <i>American Album of Familiar Music</i> | ■ <i>Ma Perkins</i>                       |
| ■ <i>Backstage Wife</i>                   | ■ <i>Mark Saber</i>                       |
| ■ <i>Betty and Bob</i>                    | ■ <i>Mr. Chameleon</i>                    |
| ■ <i>Chaplain Jim, USA</i>                | ■ <i>Mr. Keen, Tracer of Lost Persons</i> |
| ■ <i>The Couple Next Door</i>             | ■ <i>Mrs. Wiggs of the Cabbage Patch</i>  |
| ■ <i>David Harum</i>                      | ■ <i>Our Gal Sunday</i>                   |
| ■ <i>Easy Aces</i>                        | ■ <i>Romance of Helen Trent</i>           |
| ■ <i>Front Page Farrell</i>               | ■ <i>Stella Dallas</i>                    |
| ■ <i>Hearthstone of the Death Squad</i>   | ■ <i>Terry and the Pirates</i>            |
| ■ <i>Jack Armstrong</i>                   | ■ <i>Valiant Lady</i>                     |
| ■ <i>John's Other Wife</i>                | ■ <i>Waltz Time</i>                       |
| ■ <i>Just Plain Bill</i>                  | ■ <i>Young Widder Brown</i>               |

The Hummerts make sure radio programs are safe for children.

From *Broadcasting*, March 1, 1936.



# Is Everybody Happy? You Betcha

**P**REDATING RADIO, Ted Lewis had been something of an entertainment institution stretching back to World War I. A bandleader, singer, musician and entertainer, Lewis was inexorably linked to his trademark battered top hat and catch-phrase, “Is everybody happy?” Lewis was known to audiences as “The ‘High-Hatted Tragedian of Song,’” and radio critic Ben Gross (*I Looked and Listened*, Arlington House 1954) included Lewis in the same school of performers as Eddie Cantor, Al Jolson, George Jessel and Sophie Tucker. This school, Gross described, was lacking subtlety but “rich in sentimental corn, broad strokes of comedy and vitality.”

Lewis with his band would make irregular appearances on radio via remote broadcasts and occasionally as guest on programs including *Fred Allen*, *Rudy Vallee*, *The Radio Hall of Fame* and *The Chesterfield Music Shop*. It wasn't until after World War II, however, that Lewis seemed ready for a regular series of his own. But a heavy schedule of cross country engagements with his 18-piece orchestra always seemed to preclude a serious attempt at a weekly radio show.

In 1947, however, Lewis and his orchestra were playing an engagement in Chicago when a fledgling syndication company called Chartoc-Colman Productions decided to go for broke and entice Lewis with the prospect of a syndicated radio series. *Variety* declared that Chartoc-Colman had “gone off the deep end budget-wise” and was committing itself to a \$6000 per week budget on *The Ted Lewis Show*. Two Chicago advertising executives, Shep Chartoc and Ben Colman, had just started their production company the year before and had successfully produced *This Fabulous World* with newsman Alex Dreier and *The Franklyn MacCormack Book of Memories*. Ted Lewis would be their biggest gamble to date.

The audition platter for the new series was recorded near the end of April 1947 with the format already firmly established. The contract called for 26 half-hour shows. Lewis would lead his full 18-piece band in every episode. Each program would be focused on a different venue where Lewis and his band had appeared over the years. Franklyn MacCormack would announce; Shep Chartoc, at least initially, would prepare the scripts. Sherman Marks had been tapped as director. Geraldine DuBois, a regularly featured singer with Ted's live appearances, would appear weekly in the same capacity on the transcribed broadcasts. Lewis would introduce his weekly choice for future stardom in

a “star of tomorrow” segment. Each week, Ted would perform two or three of his classic songs complete with the original arrangements. Listeners were serenaded with such favorites as “When My Baby Smiles at Me,” “Me and My Shadow,” “Sunny side of the Street” and “When You're Smiling.”

It was publicized that *The Ted Lewis Show* would be available for broadcast starting in September. The intervening months were consumed with cutting the platters and selling the show to backers. Sponsors proved eager to have their products associated with *The Ted Lewis Show*, including Burlington Brewing and Hooker Paints.

Critics praised the program. *Variety* (July 23, 1947), in an early review based on the audition platter, stated that Chartoc and Colman had developed a prize package. “It's loosely formatted to provide for guest stars,” the review stated, “but wisely they've started off with a simple pattern aimed specifically at projecting the Lewis personality.” With more than a month to go before launch, the Lewis series had already been booked in more than 50 markets. *Radio Life* (October 26, 1947) stated its verdict succinctly: “To

‘is everybody happy’ the answer is now YES!”

*The Ted Lewis Show* would prove a fixture on the syndicated market for the next several years, just as Lewis himself would remain a beloved entertainer up until his passing in 1971. Chartoc-Colman Productions, however, was of a much shorter duration. By 1950, Shep Chartoc and Ben Colman had gone their separate ways and their production company ceased operations. *Broadcasting Telecasting* (August 14, 1950) reported that Harry S. Goodman Productions had negotiated the sole sales and distribution rights to *The Ted Lewis Show*. A major syndicator, Goodman's undertaking ensured *The Ted Lewis Show* continued to air throughout most of the 1950s.

In 1977, Ted Lewis's hometown of Circleville, OH opened The Ted Lewis Museum. His souvenirs and entertainment memorabilia accounted for the core of the museum's collection. The material includes Lewis's full set of transcription discs for his 1947 radio effort. The recordings have been digitized as wav files; the complete set is available for download at \$400 with the profits going towards the museum's mission of showcasing Ted's legacy. For anyone interested, a sample episode from the series is included for listening on the museum's website: <https://www.tedlewisshow.org/the-ted-lewis-show>.





# 'Nostalgia Digest' Observes 50 Years of Honoring the Past

The winter 2024 issue of *Nostalgia Digest* marks the start of its 50th year of publication, according to editor Steve Darnall, who adds that "some brand-new articles about Jack Benny, George Burns, Ernie Kovacs, radio drama in the 1960s and more are also in the issue."

As part of the golden anniversary issues, Steve notes, each issue will reprint moments from past editions, which have been long out of print yet sought by readers new and old alike.

The winter issue, for instance, will feature three such memorable moments from the past, including a career-spanning interview with harmonica virtuoso Larry Adler, who talks about touring with Jack Benny, auditioning for Paul Whiteman and meeting Al Capone; engineer Russ Rennaker's recollection of a particularly

memorable experience from the golden age of radio; and one writer's memories of preparing the house for winter.

"It's always a delight to share stories from the past," Steve says, "but we're looking forward to sharing some stories from *our* past."

*Nostalgia Digest* offers articles and features about life during the golden age of radio, movies, television, and music—written, as the editors say, by "those who lived it and those who love it."

*Nostalgia Digest* is available in print and digital formats from <http://www.nostalgia digest.com>.

Subscriptions are available by writing to Nostalgia Digest at P.O. Box 25734 in Chicago, IL 60625. Four issues, print and digital, are available for \$19 per year, or \$34 for two years. Subscriptions are also available through their secure web site listed above.



## KEN MURRAY SAYS:



My good friend Jack Oakie, the wise-cracking screen comedian, and Venita Varden, formerly of the Follies, set a pace in streamline travel when they were married Sunday during a stop-over in Yuma, AZ.

I can't believe it! Jack Oakie, the fellow who always said, "A bachelor is a guy who never makes the same mistake once."

Imagine, after all these years, one of Hollywood's most nuptial dodgers has succumbed to matrimony. Who'd a'thought a little thing like Cupid's arrow would fell a mighty Oakie?

It's understood that the couple is coming to New York, and then expects to fly to Florida. What would you call that, a honeymoon over Miami?

Doesn't it seem strange, though. A movie wedding with nobody's former husband marrying no one's former wife?

The North Adams (MA) Transcript  
March 24, 1936



## BEFORE COMPUTERS THERE WAS RADIO!

And the best place to learn all about the golden age of 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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