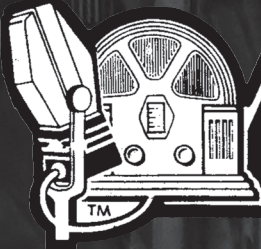


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speedy

RADIOGRAM

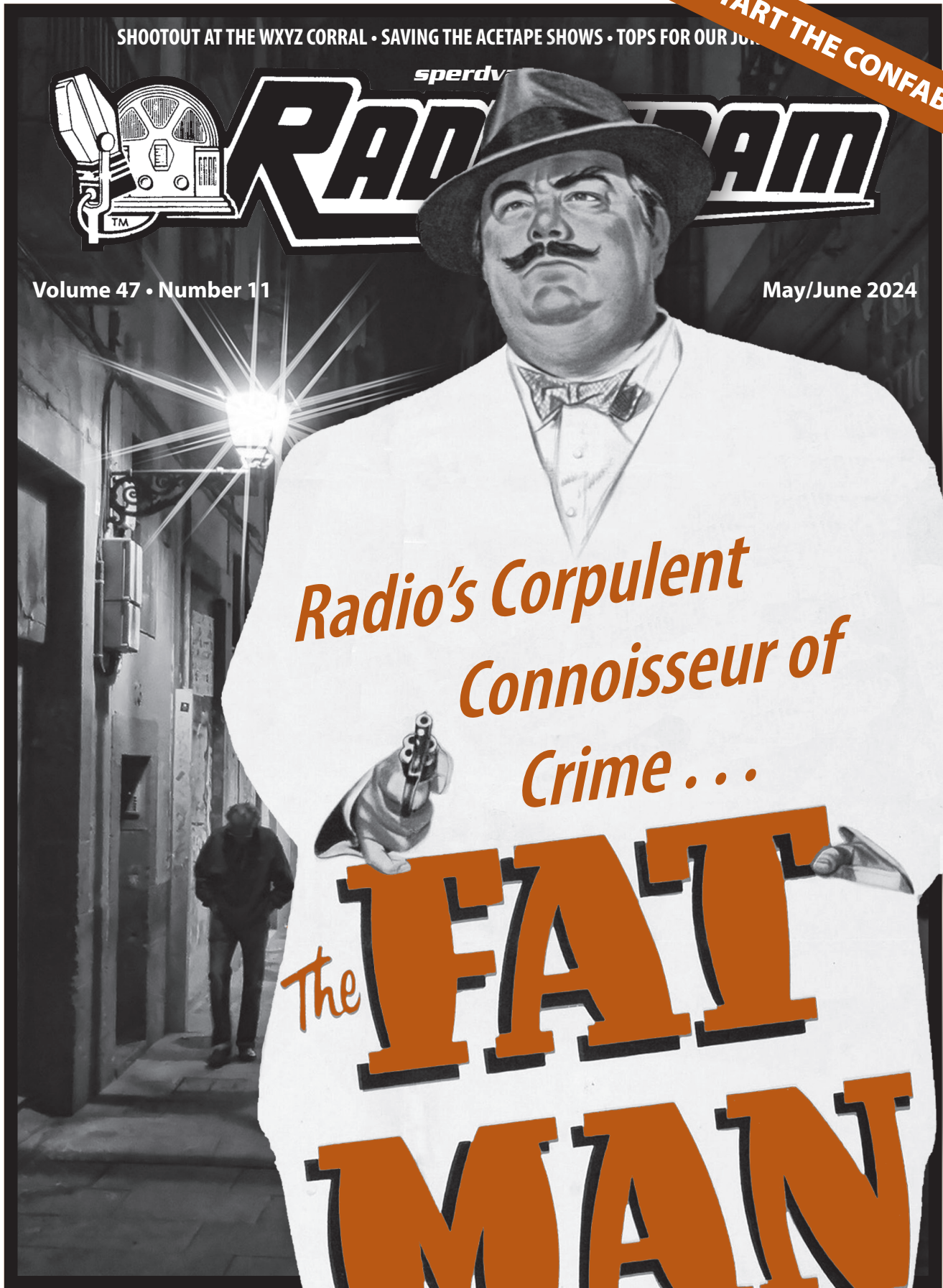
Volume 47 • Number 11

May/June 2024

*Radio's Corpulent
Connoisseur of
Crime...*



The **FAT
MAN**





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from the president

GREETINGS SPERDVAC MEMBERS,

WELL, here we are at the midpoint of 2024. Fifty years have passed by since the date this organization was founded. According to experts, that means we fall under the category of vintage. We won't achieve antique until we complete our next 50 years.

As we stand at this crucial juncture, I find myself reflecting on the future of our beloved SPERDVAC. What will the next 50 years hold for us? In contemplating this, two pivotal elements come to mind: our members and our archives. These are the cornerstones of our organization, embodying our mission and purpose. Preserving our archives and making them accessible to our members is, indeed, the perfect synthesis of these core elements.

In our world, many institutions are dedicated to the preservation of film, with over 20 such organizations easily found with a simple internet search. However, when it comes to the Golden Age of Radio, there are only about three organizations focused solely on this medium. Among them, SPERDVAC stands as the most venerable. We are entrusted with the vital task of preserving a crucial link in our nation's entertainment history. Our archives house recordings of significant historical events captured on radio that were never filmed, ensuring that the lessons and experiences of past generations are not forgotten.

This dedication to preservation has been SPERDVAC's mission since its inception. We extend our gratitude to our colleagues with the Old Time Radio Researchers. This niche area of historical preservation has too few participants actively engaged, reminiscent of a scene from Laurel and Hardy's *Flying Deuces*, in which the duo tackles a mountain of laundry one shirt at a time. The task ahead of us may seem daunting, but we will proceed with the same diligence, ironing out one detail at a time and passing our legacy on to future generations. The key is to keep moving forward, steadfast in our commitment.

Now, I want to shine a spotlight on one of our outstanding officers on the

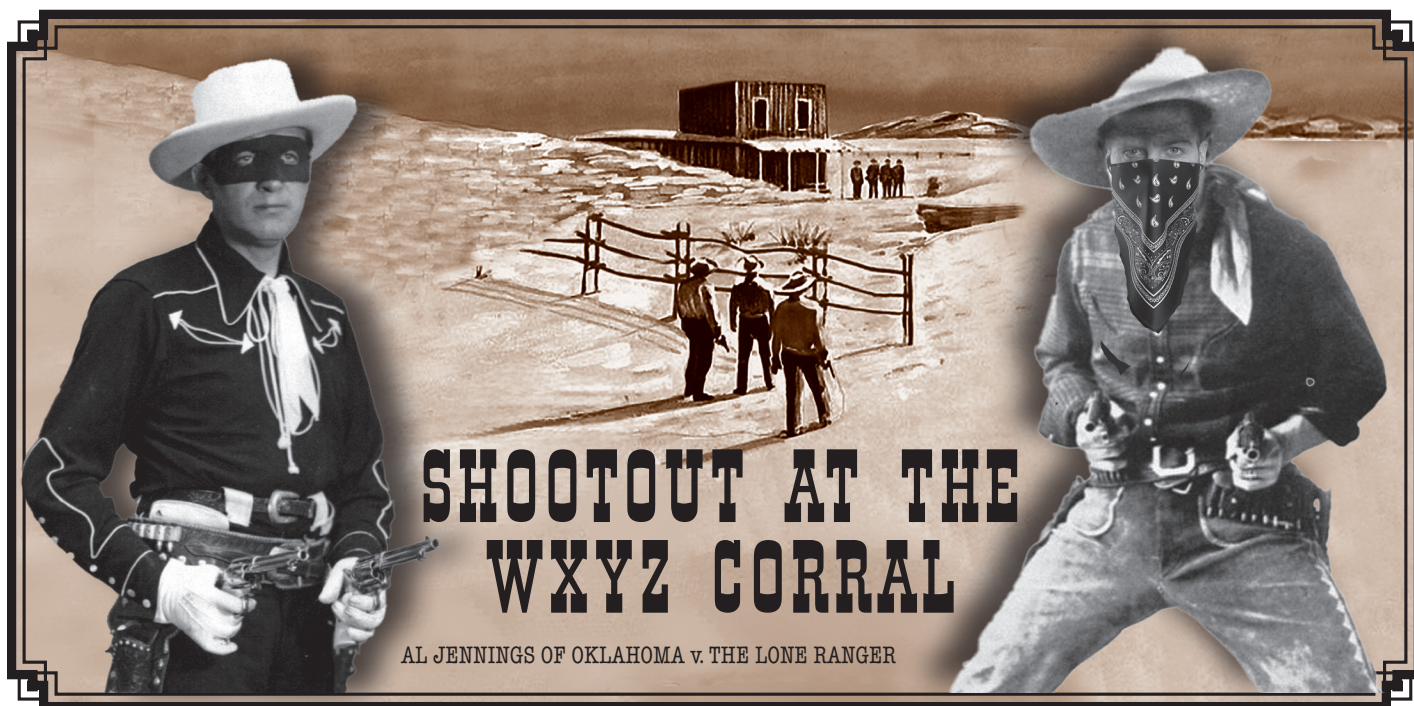
SPERDVAC board of directors, Alexander 'Xan' Chamberlin. It was a fortuitous day for SPERDVAC when he joined our ranks. As our treasurer, Xan has transcended the traditional role of simply managing the books and filing taxes. He has been instrumental in engaging with our members for renewals, coordinating aspects of the archive's relocation, and bringing his financial acumen to bear in managing our resources. His cheerful disposition and positive outlook make him a pleasure to work with. We are grateful for his ongoing contributions and look forward to his continued involvement.

Thank you, Xan, for all your exceptional work!

That's it for now.

Until next time, stay safe and stay tuned.📻

Timothy Knofler



by Martin Grams, Jr.

THE WESTERN LANDSCAPE in book, radio and motion picture form provided a canvas for the portrayal of historical characters. Such examples as to *Annie Get Your Gun* (1950) to *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* (1969) provide colorful renditions of prominent historical figures, despite historical accuracy. Romantic and dramatic renditions crept into *The Lone Ranger* radio program from time-to-time as well, including *Sitting Bull* (January 12, 1938) and *Geronimo* (March 31, 1937). No episode was more intriguing, though, than the January 18, 1939, broadcast in which it was disclosed that General George Armstrong Custer knew the identity of the masked man, and the Lone Ranger making reference that Custer was one of only a few men in the world who knew the secret.

After the December 1942 introduction of Dan Reid, the nephew of the Lone Ranger, and a full calendar year of Dan riding alongside to learn the ways of the West, producer George W. Trendle suggested changing the format of the radio program.



Beginning with the broadcast of February 14, 1944, a new schedule of stories started. Monday broadcasts would be devoted to a historical character and the Lone Ranger's brush with historical fame; Wednesday broadcasts would feature an adventure with Dan Reid; and Friday broadcasts would feature the general western type of stories. Officially Dan Reid was brought back into the series permanently on the broadcast of Wednesday, February 2, and the Lone Ranger met the famous Wyatt Earp back on the broadcast of January 3, but the new format was made official (with no interruption) with the broadcast of February 14.

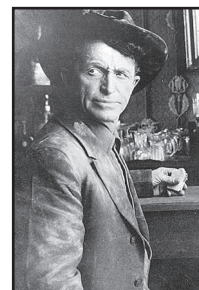
Fans today refer to these Monday broadcasts as part of the "biography" series. During those broadcasts, true historical facts were tossed aside, including continuity timelines, as the Lone Ranger fought to establish the Western Union telegraph lines which joined the nation together, gave hard riding aid to the building of the Union Pacific railroad, and fought shoulder-to-shoulder with Buffalo Bill against renegade whites and Indians. For young listeners, it was the Lone Ranger who helped Wild Bill Hickok tame the town of Deadwood. It was the Lone Ranger who sent a warning to General Custer who led a foolhardy attack on Indian forces. It was these broadcasts more than

any other that helped establish the program's opening catchphrase: "Nowhere in the pages of history can one find a greater champion of justice..."

Historical accuracies aside, the Lone Ranger persuaded Pat Garrett to become a special lawman, assigned to track down Billy the Kid. The Lone Ranger assisted Teddy Roosevelt, a young and future president, to defeat a crooked business partner. The Lone Ranger passed judgment on the famous Judge Roy Bean, who officially named himself a "judge" and dispensed justice from "The Jersey Lily." The Lone Ranger once shot a gun out of the hand of Calamity Jane and later witnessed the event that led to the death of her beloved Wild Bill Hickok. In another episode, *The Lone Ranger* program educated young listeners to why the term "Annie Oakley" once referred to free passes to an event.

The Biography Series eventually came to a close before the end of August 1944 after one of the broadcasts created a legal stir with The Lone Ranger, Inc.

Al Jennings, an 80-year-old reformed train robber and one-time Wild West bad man, glamorously portrayed in an episode of *The Lone Ranger*, filed a lawsuit against The Lone Ranger, Inc., the business entity of the radio program, seeking damages for the way he was portrayed on the radio broadcast. To everyone's surprise, including the script writer, Al Jennings was still alive at the time they depicted his criminal





Throughout 1919 and the surrounding months, Jennings took up a professional acting career often portraying himself on screen perpetuating the myth of a “good bandit.”

exploits on *The Lone Ranger*.

In 1899, Jennings was sentenced to life in prison for train robbery. Due to the legal efforts of his brother John, his sentence was reduced to five years. He was freed on technicalities in 1902 and received a presidential pardon in 1904 by President Theodore Roosevelt. After writing a number of semi-autobiographical books and stories based on his criminal escapades, Jennings moved to California and worked in the motion picture industry making Westerns. Throughout 1919 and the surrounding months, Jennings took up a professional acting career often portraying himself on screen perpetuating the myth of a “good bandit.” Jennings became a popular speaker, evangelist and writer—his life being serialized in *The Saturday Evening Post*.

On the evening of August 7, 1944, *The Lone Ranger* broadcast presented one of the usual weekly biography sketches in which the masked man brushed along a legend from the by-gone era. The Lone Ranger shot a gun out of the hands of an Oklahoma bad man, Al Jennings, who at the time was not only ravaging the countryside with his depredations, but who was in the very act of persuading a teenage boy to join his notorious band of bank and train robbers. When the Lone Ranger appeared on the scene and promptly took over, he unbraided Jennings in a stirring speech in which virtue and morality were given high due, and in which he added the punctuation by shooting the iron out of Jennings’ hand with the characteristic aplomb which only he could muster. But this was almost a costly mistake against the Lone Ranger entity.

As soon as papers were served against The Lone Ranger, Inc., George W. Trendle issued a suspension on dramatizing exploits of *The Lone Ranger* that involved the masked man’s encounters of famous outlaws and heroic figures.

Jennings was the star witness at the trial of his \$100,000 defamation suit, which ran two days, in September 1945. Adding fuel to the fire was the fact that Jennings named the Don Lee Broadcasting Company and the Weber Baking Company (the local sponsor of *The Lone Ranger* in the area where Jennings lived)

as defendants.

“They made me mad,” said Jennings who, when he took the stand, appeared more like a cracker barrel philosopher than the terror of the West. “They had this Lone Ranger shootin’ a gun out of my hand—and me an expert! You can’t shoot a gun out of a man’s hand, anyway, except in the movies. Not without shooting his hand near off. Who is this Lone Ranger, anyway?”

Jennings declared the program made him out like a bank robber, but confessed he never robbed one in his life. His complaint also alleged how the program called him a burglar and depicted him as inducing a young boy to join his bandit gang and let the masked Lone Ranger treat him like a common criminal. “He goes out and takes his chances of getting shot,” Jennings explained. “A burglar just sneaks around in the dark when no one is there.” Jennings claimed he lived an upright and honest life during the last few decades.

A jury of 11 women and one man in Superior Judge Robert Scott’s court sat in fascinated silence as Jennings described how he became an evangelist for a time to “clear my conscience” and help others avoid a life of crime.

“But I got a little tired of that,” he told Judge Scott, who was also a former minister. “Some of the preachers I found were worse than some of the outlaws, but some, of course, were marvelous.”

On the second day in court, Jennings showed that he had been socially ostracized because of the radio broadcast. According to Jennings, neighbors avoided him, and little girls wanted to join his “train robber band.”

“I’ve had a lot of hard jolts in my life,” he said, “but I never felt like I did when I heard that broadcast. It hurt me more than anything that ever happened to me.”

During the third day of the trial, Jennings kept the jurors and courtroom audience alternately tense and laughing as he described his life as a cowboy, cattle-rustler, bandit leader, politician, evangelist and lecturer.

To clarify, the gist of the case was “defamation of character” and for Jennings to have won his case, he would have had to establish

different rules for different citizens and to set the precedent for publicizing anyone’s life without his permission or consent. At least, this is what his lawyer, R. Ralston Jones, should have advised his client. Instead, Jennings chose to lodge his complaint against the defendants by emphasizing how the program damaged the reputation he built up since he was freed from prison and led a life of aspired morals.

Testimony came from W. Ray Johnston, president of Monogram Pictures, who said he knew Jennings back in 1914 when his company produced a motion picture based on the life of the ex-outlaw. Additional testimony came from Ivan J. Richison, retired “contractor and evangelist,” who offered testimony to Jennings’ career as a model citizen.

The defendants contended Jennings had no right to damages because he was a real notorious train robber and once the head of a bandit gang. They contended that he had publicized his life so fully (including in motion-pictures) that he had no privacy left regarding the matter. Cross-examined by defense counsel Clarence B. Runkle, concerning his book, *Beating Back*, Jennings said it was ghost-written by Will Irwin and should never have been used as reference for the radio program, in particular an episode in which a 17-year-old boy asked to join the gang and finally was admitted.

ON THE AFTERNOON of October 2, 1945, a verdict was handed down. Al Jennings lost his suit. The jurors returned a 10 to two verdict against the reformed train robber. The verdict upheld Runkle’s contention that Jennings’ career was not private because Jennings himself frequently wrote details of his deeds and glorified his crimes in a series of motion picture film shorts.

The main reason for their decision, one jury member later explained to a newspaper reporter, was that Jennings wittingly or otherwise had spent the week on the stand convincing the jury that no one could defame his reputation. “Gentlemen,” he said, on one occasion after describing a particularly violent gun battle in his hectic career “I regret to say I had to kill three of those men!” The jurors gasped. “But would I encourage a boy to embark on a life of crime?” hastily countered the ex-bad man. “No!”

The California court decided that Al Jennings was not entitled to his \$100,000, and the jury’s esteem of Jennings had not suffered because of the disputed radio broadcast.

Because the format of historical figures was dropped, the radio program reverted back to offering story arcs. The first of which included Kit Carson and Sitting Bull with approval by Trendle because it was clearly evident that those figures had been long dead by 1944. 🍂

OPERATION S.O.S.

SAVE OUR SOUND

DANGER

Our Acetate Tapes Are At Risk Of Material Decay

by Zach Eastman

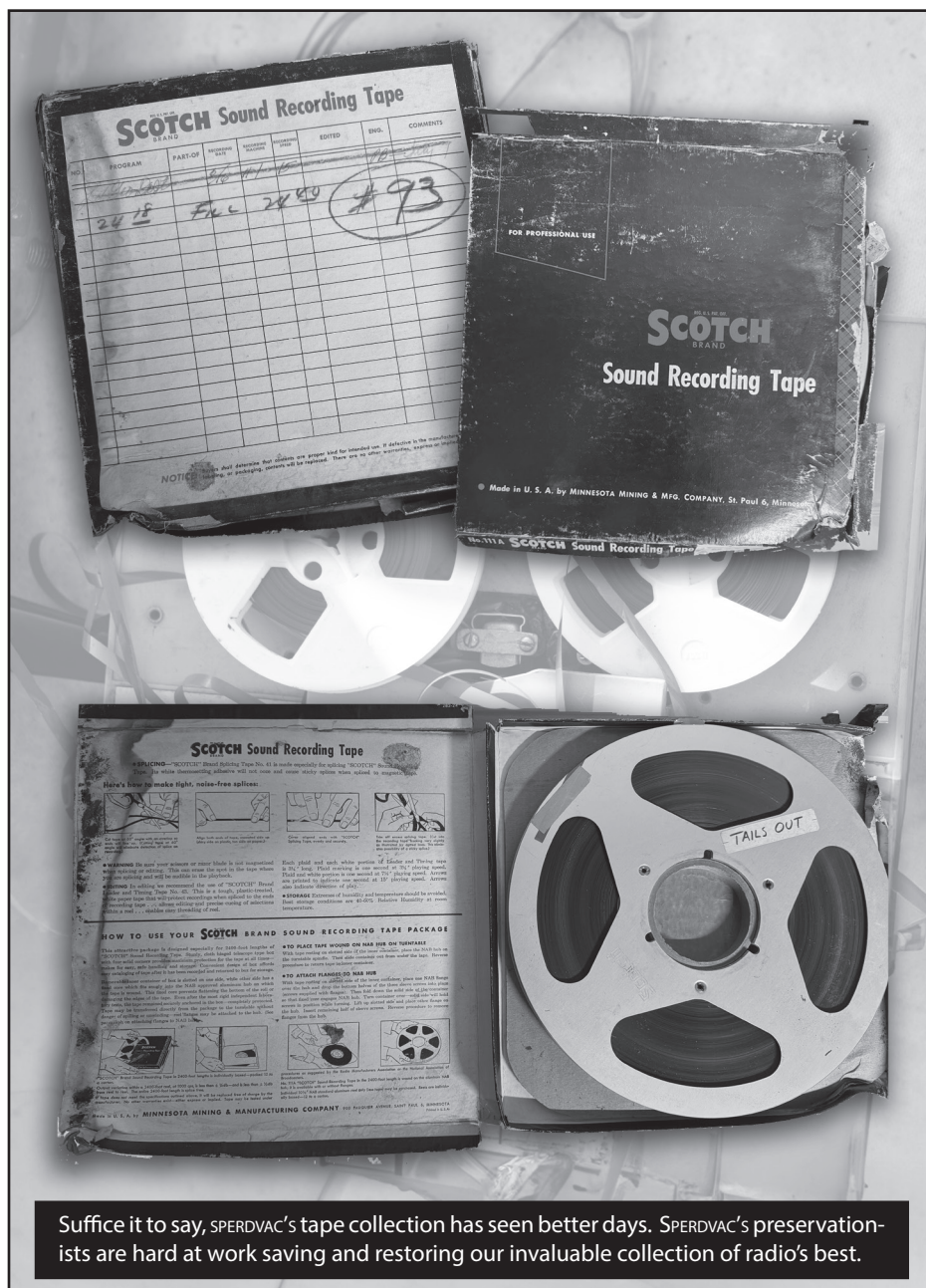
EVERY RADIO FAN of a certain age can recall at any given time the first show they heard and how they heard it. I myself can recall it was “The Bruce Partington Plans” episode of *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* on a cassette tape (paired with “The Final Problem”) with John Gielgud as Holmes.

But many collectors reading this will recall hearing them on a reel-to-reel or other means involving a solid strip of tape larger than a cassette. At the risk of sounding archaeological, it’s a process of set up and enjoyment that is dwindling with those that remember it. And methodology is not the only thing Corey Harker has seen dwindling.

As his journey to restore and preserve SPERDVAC’s large library of source material, Harker has had to escalate one particular means of recording to DefCon-1.

“The acetate tapes, especially, are the ones most at risk with material decay,” Harker stated when speaking on preservation recently. “The shelf life itself is far more limited than that of the discs we collect. At the moment they are beginning to shred, so they have to take immediate precedence.”

That shredding, as it’s referred to, consists of many of these tapes beginning to malform, become brittle, and cup. And for those of us who enjoy these masters off radio recorders, the news is alarming for fans of *Wild Bill Hickock and Gingles* *Was a Communist For The FBI*, in par-



Suffice it to say, SPERDVAC’s tape collection has seen better days. SPERDVAC’s preservationists are hard at work saving and restoring our invaluable collection of radio’s best.

ticular. A fair amount of the episodes SPERDVAC carries of those shows are located on these tapes that are beginning to curdle and cup like the rim of Hormel pepperoni.

Thankfully Harker can confirm that there is more than enough room for optimism in the arena. "While the dubs are poorer and starting to decay," he said, "they are not suffering from sticky shed syndrome as there was no black coating for these kinds of tapes up until the 1970s".

This means that the tapes will not require "baking," a process that can take up to 12-hours minimum for the process to work. And that's assuming it works the first time through; if not, then back to baking it goes.

Luckily, Corey can report that the process for sifting through and grabbing data from these acetate tapes will take only up to one hour per every half-hour show. Through a process of tensing up the tape by running it back through both backward and forward on the reel, the tape can begin to resemble enough of its former self to be scanned for digital preservation.

The allure here is hard to find in the eyes and ears of someone looking for that pristine source material, but that narrow mindset can absolutely be a detriment to anyone casually mulling over preservation. In a way, it's not as "glamorous." Yet, hearing out Corey after having seen these tapes before their trip to the new storage space, it was a somewhat more precious notion. At this point, the very first stage is rescuing the hard work not of the actual creators but of the fans themselves. Those who, for enjoyment or posterity, had the foresight so lacking in mass media entertainment's golden age to get these programs on tape. The earliest hobbyists ensured we would even have a medium to discuss much less form a club over.

The first major effort of this preservation drive has serendipitously been an effort that honors the pioneers of collecting, a moving thought that hopefully warms the reader's heart as it does this author. 🎧

JOHN RAYBURN • DARRYL HICKMAN

Received late word of the passing of SPERDVAC honorary members John Rayburn and Darryl Hickman. John contributed to *Radiogram*, and both will be missed.

DEAR ESTEEMED SPERDVAC MEMBERS . . .

EXCITING NEWS AWAITS! After a five-year hiatus due to the challenges posed by the pandemic, SPERDVAC is gearing up to mark a monumental milestone: our 50th Anniversary Convention, slated to take place in the vibrant city of Las Vegas, NV.

This occasion is not just about commemorating the past; it's about celebrating the enduring legacy of classic radio and the community that has passionately preserved it for half-a-century. We are thrilled to announce the launch of a Kickstarter fundraising campaign to ensure that this event is nothing short of spectacular.

Your support is instrumental in making this celebration a reality. By contributing to our campaign, you'll play a crucial role in bringing back the magic of in-person SPERDVAC events. With your generosity, we aim to host an unforgettable convention filled with special guests, immersive experiences, and cherished memories.

To achieve our ambitious goals, we are seeking to raise \$75,000 to cover expenses such as special guest appearances, transportation, event staffing, and the creation of a commemorative program among other essential elements. Every donation, no matter the size, will make a difference and help us honor the remarkable individuals who have shaped SPERDVAC into the premier institution it is today.

As we finalize the lineup of events and special guests, you can anticipate a diverse array of classic radio genres,

including beloved favorites like westerns, science fiction, and mysteries. We are delighted to confirm the participation of esteemed radio actors such as Beverly Washburn, Tommy Cook, Ivan Cury, and the talented impressionist Brad Zinn.

Moreover, we are thrilled to announce that our convention will take place at the exquisite Sam's Town Hotel, where attendees can indulge

in a weekend of classic radio recreations, engaging panels, celebrity interviews, and more. With its convenient location and array of amenities, including dining options, entertainment venues, and gaming facilities,

Sam's Town promises an unforgettable experience for all.

To express our gratitude for your support, we have curated a range of premium options for donors, including VIP access to exclusive events, a fundraising gala dinner, and opportunities to sponsor pages in our commemorative program. Your generosity will be duly recognized and celebrated throughout the convention.

We invite you to visit our Kickstarter page where you'll find detailed information about donation levels and accompanying rewards. Together, let's make SPERDVAC's 50th Anniversary Convention a resounding success and a testament to our shared passion for classic radio.

Thank you for your unwavering support and dedication. We look forward to celebrating this momentous occasion with you in Las Vegas!





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spervac

There he goes into that drugstore . . . he's stepping on the scales
. . . weight 237 pounds . . . fortune: *danger* . . . who is it? . . .

THE FAT MAN

A FEW THOUGHTS TOWARD AN APPRECIATION OF THAT CORPULENT CONNOISSEUR OF CRIME

by Patrick Lucanio

WHEN ONE CONSIDERS the influence of Dashiell Hammett on detective fiction one invariably thinks of Sam Spade, the epitome of the hard-boiled detective of *noir* fame—*noir* as in film and radio and as personified to the extreme by Humphrey Bogart in film (*The Maltese Falcon* 1940) and Howard Duff in radio (*The Adventures of Sam Spade* 1946-1950). To a lesser extent one may think of Nick and Nora Charles, the husband-wife detective team of Hammett's book, *The Thin Man*, which was adapted by MGM into a long-running series with comic overtones featuring William Powell and Myrna Loy.

But another Hammett creation, one fashioned specifically for radio, it is said, remains in the shadows of its celebrated brethren although the character is as well developed and pronounced as his more renowned colleagues. Unlike Sam Spade but comparable to Nick Charles, private investigator Brad Runyan is identified not by any analytical talent but by his appearance; indeed, in contrast to Nick's supposed svelteness Runyan's size invokes the designation of "Fat Man." Hence, honoring Runyan's 237 pounds—sometimes 239 pounds, for some reason—*The Fat Man* premiered January 21, 1946, on ABC for a five-year run culminating in a 1951 motion picture of the same name.

Considering how Hammett was throwing his weight around, as it were, it should be noted that Hammett's book titled *The Thin Man*, the impetus for the phenomenal success of the MGM movie series, does not refer to Nick Charles but to Wynant, the man whom Charles is hired to protect (at one point Charles

refers to Wynant as that "thin man with white hair"). Like the book, there is no linking of the "thin man" descriptor with Charles in the film.

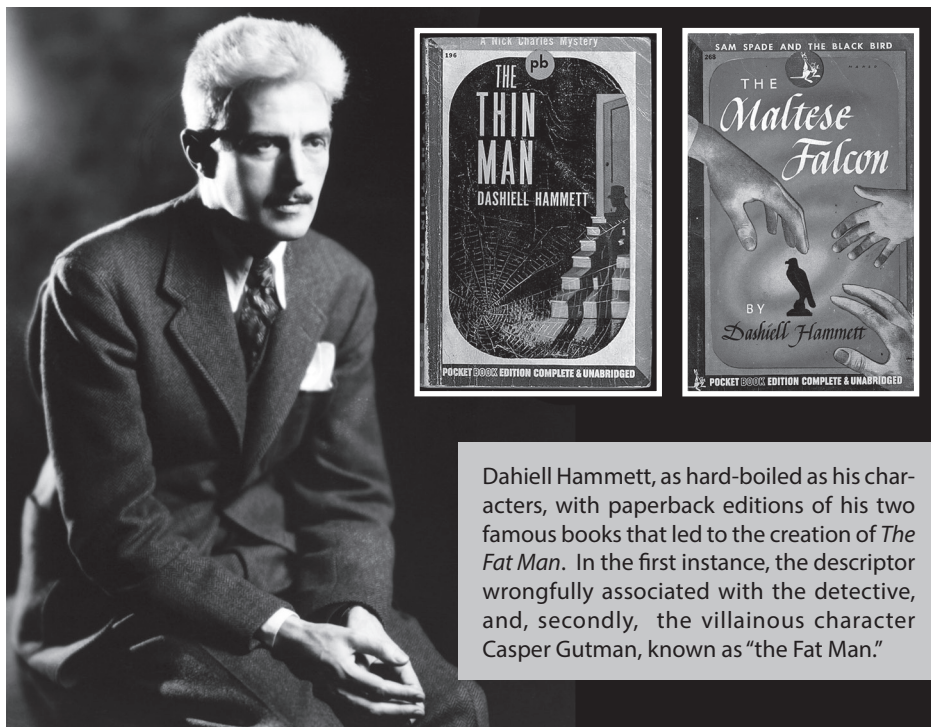


But the pairing of William Powell, a lissome performer, for sure, with Myrna Loy as the fun-loving married detectives pleased audiences to the point that a follow-up film had to be made. To maintain continuity, MGM executives appropriated the term "thin man" and gave it to Powell. Thus, subsequent films all bore the title *Thin Man* with the idea that the lithesome Powell was the title character. Additionally, the monicker was reinforced by a nearly 10-year radio run of *The Adventures of the Thin Man* (sometimes just *The Thin Man*) beginning in 1941 and featuring Les Damon (later Les Tremayne) and Claudia Morgan as Nick and Nora. Even Warner Brothers cartoons encouraged the identifying tag by depicting Powell in pencil-thin, line-drawing

caricature in their Hollywood parodies.

A beefier Hammett figure is found in *The Maltese Falcon* in the

ABC photograph of J. Scott Smart promoting *The Fat Man* on Fridays at 8 p.m. EST. The photograph was originally dated 1948 but was reproduced in the September 12, 1951, edition of the *TV Week* magazine of the Minneapolis *Sunday Tribune* with the accompanying cutline: "J. Scott Smart, 'fat man' of radio and motion pictures, was honeymooning today with his bride, the former Mrs. Mary Leigh Call Asherman of Springfield, IL. They live in Ogunquit, ME. Smart, a graduate of Miami Military Institute, was recently ordered by his studio to cut his weight from 260 to 250."



Dashiell Hammett, as hard-boiled as his characters, with paperback editions of his two famous books that led to the creation of *The Fat Man*. In the first instance, the descriptor wrongfully associated with the detective, and, secondly, the villainous character Casper Gutman, known as “the Fat Man.”

character Casper Gutman, also called the fat man even though the name itself, *Gutman*, was a proper appellation. And just as Bogart personified Spade to the extreme, rotund Sidney Greenstreet forever personified to the extreme the sinister fat man even to the point that Warner Brothers featured Greenstreet and *Falcon* co-star Peter Lorre in subsequent films as what author Clive Hirschhorn called the “Laurel and Hardy of international intrigue.”

That said, if there be a thin man why not a fat man? John Dunning, in *On the Air: The Encyclopedia of Old-time Radio*, reported that the character Gutman so intrigued producer Ed “Mannie” Rosenberg that he considered the character for a series all his own, to be branded, naturally, as *The Fat Man*. Of course, Gutman would have to be reformed; he would have to turn his quick wit to the side of law and order—perhaps like Harry Lime of *Third Man* fame would be rehabilitated

for *The Lives of Harry Lime* in 1951 and even more so in the 1959 television adaptation titled *The Third Man*. Perhaps. As Dunning furthered: “Gutman’s resemblance to the character who emerged on the air began and ended with the title” of chapter 11 of *The Maltese Falcon*, “The Fat Man.”

This leads to just how much influence did Hammett have on *The Fat Man* radio program. Most sources say very little if any. It would be safe to conclude that *The Fat Man* radio program was wholly the creation of Rosenberg, and that Hammett’s influence was limited to name recognition. That is to say name recognition in the sense that Hammett created a recognizable character called the Fat Man and name recognition in the sense that Hammett himself was well-known and whose name carried its own weight in detective fiction circles. Thus, the opening signature, spoken by Charles Irving, declares that “*The Fat Man* [is] Dashiell Hammett’s

fascinating and exciting character . . . a fast-moving criminologist who tips the scales at 237 pounds” with sponsorship, fittingly for one accustomed to overeating, by Pepto-Bismol—“when you overeat or eat too fast.”

The Fat Man, with

scripts by various writers but none credited to Hammett, presented the title character as a rotund, wise-cracking, cynical private investigator named Brad Runyan.

There is very little to distinguish this detective series from others except for the performance of the lead, J. Scott Smart, who was no stranger to radio. In 1934, *Radio Stars* (December 1934) described Smart (billed then as Jack Smart) as “the man of 100 voices . . . the man who furnishes the freak voices for ‘Town Hall Tonight’ with Fred Allen, ‘The Palmolive Beauty Box Theatre,’ ‘Forty-Five Minutes from Hollywood,’ and other such shows, both on NBC and CBS.” In addition, Smart co-starred with Jane Houston in a 1929 CBS sitcom called *Joe and Vi* (known in some circles as *Mr. and Mrs.*), which was essentially about a couple that argues together stays together. Smart also employed many dialects for sundry characters in *The March of Time* (reportedly doing close imitations of the inimitable Huey Long and Fiorello La Guardia). Additionally, Jim Harmon, in *Radio Mystery and Adventure and Its Appearances in Film, Television and Other Media*, writes that Smart appropriately portrayed Mycroft Holmes—in form

and substance—in the Bromo-Quinine years (1939-1942) of *Sherlock Holmes*.



J. Scott Smart
by J. Scott Smart 1947

When he wasn’t behind the microphone, on the Broadway stage, or in front of the movie cameras, Smart was a song and dance man, played drums in a cabaret combo, and was a member of a New England stock touring company. It was said that Smart, though amiable, was pretty much a recluse and found serenity in a fisherman’s shack in Perkin’s Cove in Ogunquit, ME.

“I had what was virtually a nervous breakdown on the sidewalk in front of Paddy Clarke’s [saloon],” Smart admitted to columnist Mel Heimer (“My New York” *Rockland County Journal News* July 10, 1951). “That was the end [of nightly carousing]; I decided the point had come for me to get out of my rut.” At the invitation of friend John Falter, an artist who had used Smart as a model, the dispirited actor found comfort in the small community and decided to take up residence.

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For listeners it didn’t matter but for readers it was a different story, er, spelling. Brad’s surname is all over newspapers and trade journals as both Runyan and Runyon. Not having access to a script Runyan will suffice here as seen in the *dramatis personae* at the end of the 1951 film adaptation.

He commuted by air to New York for his radio work. Smart painted watercolors of New England seascapes and practiced the fine art of gourmet cooking, his clam spaghetti his specialty, noting that he liked to cook and eat, and that he ate what he cooked. Moreover, being tacitly associated with the law-and-order profession, Smart served as a reserve officer with the Ogunquit police-fire department, reportedly playing cribbage three nights per week with the Chief of Police, and was called into service to direct traffic during a catastrophic fire on November 8, 1948 that leveled the historic Coe house. The Biddeford *Daily Journal* opined that Mr. Smart “did an excellent job of diverting traffic away from the fire.”

Although a radio creation, Smart may have secured his title role as *The Fat Man* because of his appearance. *Radio Mirror* (July 1947) stated that Smart “looks the part—it was felt that only a man of proper proportions could successively convey the distinctive Fat Man personality over the air.” Smart was corpulent, hitting the scales at one point at 267 pounds with a 58-inch waist, and thus made for the perfect image of radio’s stout detective. Smart, however, denied that his girth had anything to do with his casting. He declared ardently to reporter Charles Queenan (The Portsmouth [NH] *Herald*, May 26, 1950) that the title was not derived from his physical stature. Queenan then appended that “Smart’s casual, caustic, ‘know-it-all’ radio voice was exactly what the sponsor was looking for.”

THE FAT MAN made his grand entrance in 1946 with an unconventional and memorable introduction, one that could have been easily written for comedy if not for the melodramatic overtones:

Theme: Up and under.
Woman: There he goes into that drugstore. He’s stepping on the scales.
Sound: A coin dropping into the slot of a weighing machine.
Woman: Weight 237 pounds.
Sound: A card falling into a slot.
Woman: Fortune: danger! Who is it?
Man: The Fat Man.

For some reason, the words spoken by the woman are spoken by a man in some episodes.

The narratives themselves unfold in a typically noir-inspired world of crime and intrigue underscored by its memorable music. Composed especially for the series by Bernard Green, and reportedly played live by an 11-piece orchestra, the theme became



“Blair was found dead in his penthouse, shot through the ear—and you, Miss North, were seen leaving that apartment!” Lieutenant McKenzie (John McGovern) exclaims to Lila North (Mary Patton), who ignores the browbeating cop. Brad Runyan, the Fat Man, played by J. Scott Smart, casts doubts on McKenzie’s accusation in this scene from a *Radio Mirror* picture story (July 1947) called “The Fat Man Finds the Man Who Wasn’t There.”

as well-known to listeners as Wilbur Hatch’s theme for *The Whistler*. Described by Dunning as a “marvelously fat theme, eight notes created especially for the series and blown plumply out of a bass horn,” the theme was so familiar that Universal used it as the main title for its 1951 film adaptation.

Runyan’s weight is not the focus of the narratives; indeed, his weight is mentioned in passing, usually without humor or irony, although bad guys, as is their wont, may offer a few bulk-related slurs. Any references to his weight are pretty much limited to his keen and acute culinary tastes, or to his surprising (for his size, of course) agility at subduing the many miscreants he encounters.

Before continuing, it should be noted that


listening to extant recordings of *The Fat Man* often leads to confusion of characterization; indeed, sampling episodes finds Runyan at times being brash, acerbic and irascible all the while erudite while at other times we find Runyan merely a hard-boiled Sam Spade by another name. The reason for this inconsistency in characterization is that *The Fat Man* was remade in 1954 by an Australian radio network. A New Zealander named Lloyd Berrell appeared in the title role, and unlike his American counterpart Mr. Berrell did not, first, appear particularly obese (as if it mattered for radio) and, second, had none of the nuances of delivery as that of Jack Smart. Berrell’s Runyan, sans any noticeable accent, was purely a mundane detective albeit of

the hard-boiled strain with little distinction to be anything other than an imitation of Sam Spade. According to Jim Cox (*Radio's Crime Fighters*), 36 extant recordings of the Australian version exist whereas a mere 10 recordings of the American version remain (out of five years on the air!), and Internet collections of *The Fat Man* often commingle the two versions into a supposed complete collection of the series.

With that said, what we can say about *The Fat Man* proper is that the characterization of Brad Runyan belongs to J. Scott Smart. His physical appearance, adorning broadcasting trade journals and fan magazines, reinforced the image in the minds of listeners as a character true to his sobriquet. Moreover, many reviews and press announcements asserted, rather dubiously, that Smart's delivery suggested a heavy man. Maybe so, but what is indeed evident is that Smart's technique was inimitable. He savored each line, as a gourmet would savor a feast; he delivered the requisite hard-boiled lines with a graceful cadence, ending each uttered statement with a certain, expansive inflection that suggested confidence if not outright superiority; it's as if Runyan is saying between the lines that, "I know it all so take that." To say unique here is to affirm Smart's contribution to the series.

THOUGH THE RADIO SHOW'S original run came to an end in 1951, *The Fat Man* resurfaced the same year in a film adaptation featuring Smart reprising his radio role. Also featured were Julie London, Jayne Meadows, Jerome Cowan, John Russell and Rock Hudson with Emmett Kelly, the sad clown of circus fame. Runyan was given an assistant, William Norton, played by Clinton Sundberg, whose job seemed to be to make sure the bountiful cuisine was just right for the Fat Man's palate.

The script by Harry Essex and Leonard Lee went for more humor than suspense; indeed, there is more humor about Runyan's size than was ever embraced in the radio version. The Fat Man is introduced as if he were a surgeon conducting a delicate operation but as the camera reveals he is teaching fellow chefs the fine art of slicing a delicacy. The scene is at best silly but worse presents Runyan as more a supercilious quack than



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Celebrating big and tall fashion in 1951 by winning a beautifully tailored suit for a "fat friend" awarded personally by radio's J. Scott Smart, famous Fat Man detective, in tie-in with *The Fat Man* showing at the Lafayette theatre in Buffalo, NY. From the *Buffalo Evening News*, May 4, 1951

the determined detective of the radio series. Adding more insult, Runyan is seen dining frequently, and has trouble getting in and out of a phone booth, and when freeing himself from the tight confines of the booth he runs into an obese child eating ice cream whose plump mother warns the child that if he continues stuffing himself, he'll look like that, pointing heartlessly at Runyan.

But despite the recurrent references to his size, there are passing compensating moments, such as when Runyan asks Pat Boyd (Julie London) if she cared to dance. She

hesitates a moment and then joins Runyan on the dance floor where he surprises Pat and the others with his spirited and supple dance moves.

Moreover, Smart's characterization of Runyan has little of the radio's flair. He is stilted and like just about everything else in the film flat. That nuance of delivery so prevalent on radio is inconsistent in the film, leaving Runyan's size as the distinctive aspect of the film resulting in nothing but an oversized poor imitation of Sam Spade. Runyan in the film seems to predate the characterization that will be pronounced in the Australian version.

There are other problems with the film as well, notably the lack of any visual distinction. Director William Castle, who had directed

TODAY ONLY

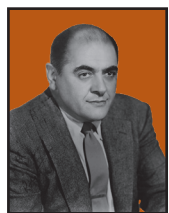


The FAT MAN

Starring **J. SCOTT SMART** Radio's Original Fat Man

several *Whistler* features in the 1940s and later became notorious for his gimmick-laden horror films (*Macabre*, *House on Haunted Hill*, *The Tinger*, *13 Ghosts*, etc.), did very little to generate a film noir ambiance that the radio series promised. The lighting is flat and settings are mundane; in fact, the film's overall effect is routine and finishes no different from a standard whodunit of the time.

Trade journals reported as early as 1958 that Mannie Rosenberg had sold the television rights to Screen Gems, which proposed a 30-minute series to ABC. In turn, ABC demanded a 60-minute series, which Screen Gems produced in 1959 called *The Fat Man*. But for whatever reason the series failed to appear even though trade journals reported that the series had a Friday night time slot.



From information culled from various sources including the Internet, the television translation starred Robert Middleton as one Lucius Crane, a corpulent and rather seditary private eye. Like the film version, Crane also had an aide, played by youthful, hip Tony Travis (to rival "Kookie" of *77 Sunset Street*, as one wag put it), who apparently functioned in a similar manner by preparing meals. As Brad Runyan before him, Mr. Crane was an erudite epicurean.

The pilot episode was titled "The Thirty-Two Friends of Gina Lardelli," and was written by Ivan Goff and Ben Roberts, experts in suspenseful melodramas. The pilot's director was Joseph H. Lewis, whose *The Big Combo* (1955) is one of Hollywood's finest *film noir* features.

It was reported by Internet sources that "The Thirty-Two Friends of Gina Lardelli" was recycled by the authors as an episode of the 1970s series *Mannix*.



Of course, having absolutely no relation to *The Fat Man*, the 1970s CBS series *Cannon* featured William Conrad as ex-cop private eye Frank Cannon, who just happened to be a corpulent, erudite epicurean.

Later, Conrad appeared as J. L. "Fatman" McCabe, an attorney, whose investigator is a young, hip Jake Styles, and whose best friend is a bulldog named Max, in the 1980s series *Jake and the Fatman*. The only association

with the radio series is a compound spelling of the title.

As noted, the film version of *The Fat Man* brought the radio series to a close. J. Scott Smart, however, moved on to *The Top Guy*, which some sources say was a Mannie Rosenberg series for ABC although most reviews say the series was produced by Leonard Blair, who had been an east coast executive with ABC.

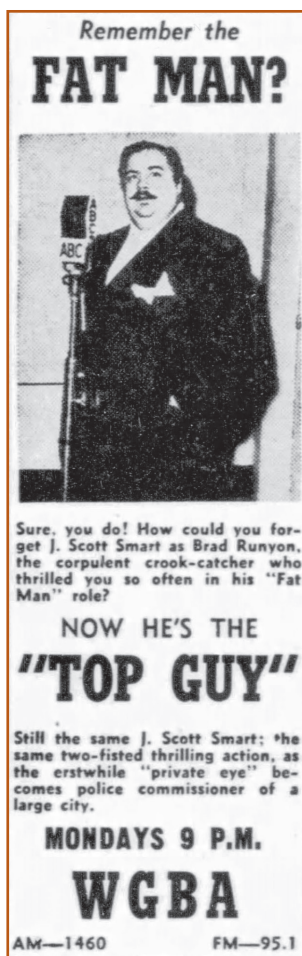
The ABC blurb described the series as "an exciting new weekly mystery drama series based on the crime-busting activities of a large metropolitan police department."

Continuing, the blurb states: "Weaving thrilling and authentic dramas of the fight against crime by law enforcement agencies, particularly, the office of police commissioner, the program will star the noted radio, stage and screen actor, J. Scott Smart, as the 'top guy' on the force

who has worked his way up through the police ranks to his present office, and is known to his contemporaries as a man who defies the underworld's guns by his bravery and unrelenting courage. Whenever and wherever a crime is committed, the top guy is on hand to offer judicious advice to the newest rookie and to help plan the police action with his veteran buddies."

Little else is known about this series other than it follows the *Dragnet* police procedural pattern. And although the setting is any metropolitan area, one episode, "The Case of the Three Red Heads" (January 23, 1952), apparently takes on noir-ish tones as the commissioner investigates the knife-slayings of three women in a location called Central Park. Further, newspaper stories emphasized a Jack the Ripper connection to the grisly homicides.

JIM HARMON notes, in *The Great Radio Heroes*, that "only the great booming voice and sly intonations of the man we knew as the Fat Man still bring the series to mind." Yes, but the title itself, being against conventional politesse of its time as well as today, also brings the series to mind if only



in an awkward manner. The standards of the series' own time celebrated the slim, trim physique as often depicted in motion pictures and certainly in physical culture magazines; the opposite, of course, often brought laughter if not ridicule. The label "fat man" would have been considered, at best, a friendly handle as in "rolly-poly, jolly fat man" or, at worse, an ill-mannered epithet as in "big fat slob." With today's fragile sensibilities the use of the appellation evokes even more caution if not outright anxiety in the sense of "fat-shaming." One can even envision today, for instance, a university administrator expelling a student caught listening to an episode of a radio drama with such an "offensive" title.

But *The Fat Man* would be considered revolutionary if given the chance. Brad Runyan embraced body positivity long before the term became

a cultural buzzword. Listening to episodes, even casually, reveals that Runyan's size was not a source of shame or ridicule but rather a defining trait that contributed to his charm and uniqueness; indeed, even size is no limiter to physical agility as Brad subdued the lawless with just as much gusto as his more strapping counterparts. Moreover, size is no limiter to romance in the series as Runyan is depicted as somewhat of a ladies' man with proper reciprocation. To be modern, we could say that the show's unapologetic celebration of a larger-than-life protagonist challenged societal norms and helped pave the way for a more inclusive and accepting portrayal of characters in the media.

But that narrows the significance of the series to a mere label. *The Fat Man* was more than just the sum of its size. As mentioned, the show belonged to J. Scott Smart, a versatile actor with a career spanning several decades who showcased his remarkable versatility through a diverse range of roles, from comedic to dramatic. It was said that Smart's performances were distinguished by his nuanced delivery; truly, such was the case for J. Scott Smart as Brad Runyan, *The Fat Man*. 🍷



Fred Robbins Is 'Tops For Our Juke Money'

IN THE 1950s radio found itself fighting a two-front war. On one battlefield, television was commandeering audiences, sponsors, talent and dollars that had once belonged to radio. On a second front, jive talking deejays were making disturbing inroads over the airwaves. The traditional drama, variety and comedy formats seemed in danger of being eclipsed by platter spinners speaking an increasingly unrecognizable version of English. It was unsettling enough when the deejay was heard on unfiliated stations or syndicated transcriptions carried over affiliates during off hours. When a major network seemingly waved the white flag, it underscored a medium in reluctant transition. Networks had frequently offered musical broadcasts, but it had typically been live music announced by well enunciating practitioners of the language, not recorded music presented by glib spielers.

On April 26, 1955, CBS radio debuted *Disk Derby*, initially as a sustainer. It would air Tuesday through Saturday evenings in prime time. Signed to host the series was Fred Robbins, one of the most recognized deejays in broadcasting.

At the age of 20, Robbins had earned a law degree from the University of Baltimore Law School but was too young to immediately practice law. He had been long attracted to music and radio and quickly found employment at a succession of radio stations starting with Baltimore station WITH where he had a sports program as well as hosting *Swing Class*, Robbins' initial foray into presenting recorded music.

Fred moved to New York City and WHN in 1942. Robbins was the announcer for the Blue Network series, *Eddie Condon's Jazz Concert*. In November 1945, he assumed deejay duties on New York's WOV on the *1280 Club* program. In 1948, *Robbins' Nest*, a Monday - Saturday transcribed disc-jockey series began airing from WOV. As *Newsweek* pointed out, WOV may have been one of NYC's smallest independent stations, but Fred Robbins' had one of the city's largest audiences.

The radio critic, Sid Shalit, appraised Fred's skills in a column (January 28, 1947), writing that, "Tops for our juke money is Fred Robbins on WOV, a youngster with an ingratiating personality, quick mind and tongue, and that rare ability to talk jive without sounding sophomoric." About this same time the Armed Forces Radio Service began including truncated versions of *Robbins' Nest* in its popular *Music You Like* series promoting the U.S. Marine Corps.

By the time CBS executives decided to feature a deejay across their

full network, Fred Robbins had more than sufficient credentials for the job. Robbins was then also serving as announcer on television's *Coke Time with Eddie Fisher*.

Tuesday through Friday evenings, Robbins hosted three recording artists with new releases. A live studio audience would select the winner via an applause meter. The winners from each of the first four nights of competition would return on Saturday to be pitted against each other with the Saturday audience selecting the winner of the week.

On the first Saturday the four finalists were Lena Horne, Terri Stevens, Alan Dale and Mary McCoy. The winner was Terri Stevens with "Don't Keep It a Secret." Designated as the "Disk Derby Record of the Week," each winner had the full force of the network plugging their recording throughout the coming week. CBS owned stations and affiliates promoted the winning record for upwards of 1500 plays with participating programs including *Amos 'n' Andy* and *Rudy Vallee*. Later winners would include Eddie Fisher ("Heart"), Richard Maltby ("Book of Love"), Pat Boone ("Ain't That a Shame") with Nat King Cole winning twice with "My One Sin" and "Forgive My Heart."

Reviews for *Disk Derby* were mixed. *Variety* (May 4, 1955) reported that the music business itself had mixed feelings toward

the program. Yes, the substantial number of guaranteed plugs garnered by the weekly winner was hugely attractive, but the possibility that studio audiences might be unfairly packed with supporters of a particular artist was concerning. *Variety* pointed out that the premiere week had offered listeners nothing new. Most of the recordings previewed on *Disk Derby* had already received exposure by local deejays.

Despite such criticism *Disk Derby* managed to garner a backer when the tobacco company, Brown and Williamson, picked up sponsorship of the Tuesday and Saturday segments. However, by fall, CBS had hired a new programming chief, Howard Barnes, who was no fan of deejay programming. With Barnes' ascension, CBS quickly became, according to *Billboard* (November 1, 1955), "probably the most anti-deejay format network."

By the end of September, *Disk Derby* had been pulled from the CBS schedule. Robbins' career was unaffected. Starting on October 8, Fred found himself hosting a new CBS series called *Young Ideas* highlighting emerging young vocalists. Robbins would continue to offer his take on the world of music as a broadcaster and writer up until his passing in 1992. ♣



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Audio is the medium of choice for the visually impaired. It is a significant source of entertainment, information and engagement. Today, audio media has many different forms—radio, podcasts, audio books, live audio theatre, audio fan groups, etc. Technology has also expanded access and participation, from braille to print and computer to audio and audio to print.

Several of our SPERDVAC members are visually impaired and have been actively engaged in the running of our organization. As we celebrate our 50th anniversary, SPERDVAC is dedicated to expanding both access and participation in audio media to all our members. Currently we provide the ability to access our audio library and an audio version of our *Radiogram* magazine.

Our goal is to not only provide the visually impaired easier access to their preferred audio media but it is also to create opportunities for all to participate/work in audio media. This is not just a potential but a current reality that blind and vision-paired are already working throughout the business as writers, performers, engineers, promoters/influencers and yet not to the extent that they can and should.

They represent a significant professional talent base in the business, and an opportunity to provide employment for their unique talents. Their reliance on an audio world gives them a unique appreciation for getting the whole picture from the audio production. Having less physical reference, they can be experts at defining a truly effective audio presentation.

SPERDVAC is working with several audio media companies and organizations for the blind to develop participation opportunities by bringing all forms of audio media—radio, podcasts, audio theatre, etc. SPERDVAC's current partners include The Audio Publishers Association, The Podcast Academy, New York Council For the Blind, The Lion Clubs (blindness is their signature cause) and VISIONS of NY. And we look to add more participants who can benefit from this effort.

Our first objective is to work with these groups and other interested partners to identify and build a network of current blind audio media professionals, interested in sharing their talents.

Our second step: with having demonstrated the extent of the need and opportunity, our second step is to attract companies and public and private backing to create funding, training and employment opportunities.

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