

JIMMY DURANTE—IN POYSON! • ADVENTURES OF THE FLYING PATROL • SPY AT LARGE

sperdvac

RADIOGRAM

Volume 47 • Number 12

July/August 2024

FUNNY BUSINESS

THE SITCOM APPROACHES

THE CENTURY MARK





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from the president

GREETINGS SPERDVAC MEMBERS,

HERE WE ARE, hip-deep in the summer of 2024, and things are heating up.

Many of you are probably wondering where we are on the convention and the crowdfunding campaign we discussed in the May/June *Radiogram*.

Unfortunately, we found out—too late to change the information in the *Radiogram*—that Kickstarter would not fulfill our needs and could potentially reduce our chances for a successful fundraising campaign. We have since found a better means to raise funds for our next convention and that application is called FundRazr.

We held our last SPERDVAC convention in Costa Mesa in November 2019. A six-year gap has required us to take a more creative approach to producing the event. In the past, it was usual for members to book accommodations for the following year, creating a kind of “roll over” support that kept things warmed up for the following event. Now, five years later, it will take a substantial flame to relight the boiler and get our convention up to full steam.

I appreciate all of you who responded to our member survey some months ago, indicating California as the preferred choice. This was our original plan. However, many critical elements have changed since then making the selection of that venue impossible. The new location we are targeting is Sam’s Town in Las Vegas, NV. We have inspected the venue and find it to be an excellent choice. It provides all of the facilities, staff, and support required for an undertaking of this kind. We are targeting the dates of May 1st through the 4th, 2025. It is important to note, however, that the location, the dates, and the convention itself will depend upon our successful fund raising campaign. Costs have risen so much in the past few years that it is beyond our ability to afford a major event like this from your organization’s savings. We are also looking to keep the attendance fee in an acceptable range for you as well.

Barring any unforeseen complications, our crowdfunding campaign will begin on September 1st and continue for 60 days. We will know the success of the effort by November—which will give use enough time to determine whether we can hold the conven-

tion in May 2025

We will be sending out many email communications providing all of the details to access the funding page as well as particulars for the event during this 60-day period. We will also be communicating the progress and results on our webpage, www.spervac.com. If you have any questions, please contact us at

info@spervac.com. When the campaign starts we will appreciate anything you can do to support the campaign. Beyond donations, please tell your friends, family and business associates about it. The more we can get our message out, the greater the opportunity we will have to not only achieve our goal, but perhaps pick up new members and, importantly, volunteers to help support

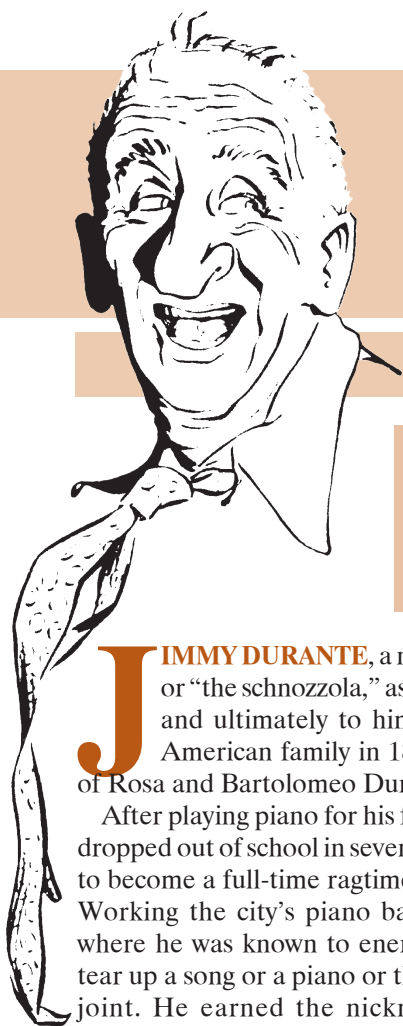
the over all aims of your organization.

One other quick update for you: we are continuing to consolidate the SPERDVAC archives. More and more of our audio treasures are being maintained in a very secure, climate-controlled facility. Our director of archives, preservation, and restoration, Corey Harker, is busy automating the cataloging and retrieval process.

One more item before I go: The number and types of audio files available to our members are receiving a significant upgrade. We hope to provide all the details to you soon.

Until next time, stay safe and stay tuned.!

Timothy Knofler



IN POYSON

by Yolanda Day

presenting
the man who followed his NOSE to success



JIMMY DURANTE, a native of Brooklyn, “the schnozz,” or “the schnozzola,” as he referred to his large proboscis and ultimately to himself, was born into an Italian-American family in 1893. Jimmy was the fourth child of Rosa and Bartolomeo Durante. And what a child!

After playing piano for his family he dropped out of school in seventh grade to become a full-time ragtime pianist. Working the city’s piano bar circuit where he was known to energetically tear up a song or a piano or the whole joint. He earned the nickname he gave himself, “Ragtime Jimmy,” and joined one of the first recognizable jazz bands in New York, the Original New Orleans Jazz Band. He was the only member not from New Orleans.

By the mid-1920s Jimmy was part of a trio named Clayton, Jackson and Durante. Then in his first theatrical break Jimmy and his pal Jackson were cast in the Cole Porter musical *The New Yorkers*, which opened December 8, 1930, on Broadway. The musical was built to order around Durante’s comic genius. In fact, Jimmy wrote five of the 17 songs featured in the musical—the only five songs in which he was a featured performer.

A review in the December 9, 1930, *New York Times* had this to say about his performance in *The New Yorkers*:

With Jimmy comedy runs a feverish temperature, delivers a knockout blow every 10 seconds and ruins all the props in sight. He begins with one of his own poetic anthems, entitled “The Hot Patata.” Throughout the rest of the evening he fights his way through other learned subjects in a frenzy of hat-throwing, pal-slapping excitement with bloodthirsty assaults on the innocent orchestra. *The New Yorkers* is as overpoweringly funny as a weak-muscled

theatre-goer can endure.

It sounds like Jimmy’s flair for slinging the verbiage around was already in full bloom! The colorful, seemingly innate slang and mispronunciations just flowed like wine with such expressions as, “Dem are da conditions dat prevail,” “Ev-rybody wants

ta get intah da act!” Of course after a particularly good or bad groaner he always followed with, “I got a million of em! A mill-ion of em!” Jimmy knew his strengths; he once said, “I’m smart enough to know dat the day I starts talkin’ good English, back I goes to da pianner!” But the guy enjoyed his butchery of the language. He said, “I don’t split infinitives. When I go ta woik on an infinitive, I break it up in little pieces.”

Jimmy also appeared on Broadway in *Show Girl* (1929), *Strike Me Pink* (1934), *Jumbo* (1935) and *Red Hot and Blue* (1936). His Broadway success quickly led to offers from Hollywood. He appeared in *The Phantom President* (1932) as the sidekick of star George M. Cohan and then replaced Cliff Edwards as the comic foil in three Buster Keaton comedies, *Speak Easily* (1932), *The Passionate Plumber* (1932), and *What! No Beer?* (1933).

Other films included *Meet the Baron* (1933), *Hollywood Party* (1934), the Gene Autry musical western *Melody Ranch* (1940), *The Man Who Came to Dinner* (1942), *Ziegfeld Follies* (1945), *The Great Rupert* (1949), *Billy Rose’s Jumbo* (1962), and *It’s a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World* (1963).

As you can see from the Broadway and movie roles no grass grew under Jimmy’s feet, but that wasn’t the whole of it. Exuding his usual charm and energy Jimmy broke the sight barrier with the radio audience when Eddie Cantor left the



“I don’t split infinitives. When I go ta woik on an infinitive, I break it up in little pieces.”

show for two months in the fall of 1933 to film a movie and gave Jimmy his first big radio break. Jimmy covered for host Eddie Cantor on the highly rated *Chase and Sanborn Coffee Hour*, which was a 60-minute comedy variety show on NBC-Red. Prior to that his only radio experiences were brief exposures as a guest on Ed Sullivan's talk show in January 1932 and Rudy Vallee's show in May 1933.

After covering for Cantor, Jimmy moved on to *The Jumbo Fire Chief Program*, another NBC-Red show, which originated from WEA radio in New York (1935–1936). The program starred Jimmy playing Claudius "Brainy" Bowers, an overzealous circus promoter who usually got the show into financial crisis due to his over exaggeration of the show's profits. Also starring were Donald Novis and Gloria Grafton. The series was broadcast from and performed at the New York Hippodrome before an average crowd of 4500–5000 spectators each week.

For his next radio show he was paired up with a new comic named Garry Moore in *The Durante-Moore Show*, which ran on NBC from March 25, 1943, to October 28, 1943, and on CBS from October 8, 1943, to June 27, 1947. Introduced as part of his exit for this show was Jimmy's own novel composition, "Inka Dinka Doo", with lyrics by Ben Ryan. It had been a hit record in 1934 and became his theme song for the rest of his life. Moore left the show in mid-1947, and the program returned October 1, 1947, as *The Jimmy Durante Show*. Durante continued the show for three more years and featured a reunion of the Clayton, Jackson, and Durante trio on his April 21, 1948, broadcast.

Then, of course, there was television,

from 1944 to 1970. Here the audience got a good look at the squashed fedora covering the bald little man who had done it all.

Jimmy's final television appearance, as it were, was in 1969 with the broadcast of the Christmas animated special, *Frosty the Snowman*. Jimmy narrated and sang the holiday favorite, reprising his 1950 rendition of the Walter Rollins and Steve Nelson song.

Jimmy Durante married Jean "Jeanne" Olson on June 19, 1921. She was 46 years old when she died on Valentine's Day in 1943, after a lingering heart ailment of about two years. Jimmy's famous exit line, "Good night, Mrs. Calabash, wherever you are" was said to be a salute to Jeanne.

Jimmy married his second wife, Margaret "Margie" Little, on December 14, 1960. They had met 16 years before their marriage, when he performed at the Copacabana and she was a hatcheck girl there. She was 41 and he was 67. They adopted a baby, Cecilia Alicia, nicknamed CeCe and known as CeCe Durante-Bloum, on Christmas Day, 1961. Margie died on June 7, 2009, at the age of 89.

Jimmy retired from performing in 1972 following a stroke that confined him to a wheelchair. He died as a result of pneumonia on January 29, 1980, shortly before his 87th birthday.

For his countless years of service to the Fraternal Order of Eagles, the Eagles' Children's Fund was named in honor of Jimmy Durante in 1966. The man who did it all "for da kids" was a staple at F.O.E. gatherings and performed at 14 consecutive International Conventions free of charge until his death in 1980. His kind, gentle and hilarious demeanor inspired members to give back and make a differ-

The Great Schnozzola meets Gabby, Gabby Hayes, that is, in *Melody Ranch*, a Gene Autry feature based on Gene's radio show, also called *Melody Ranch*, with Jimmy as the program's announcer.



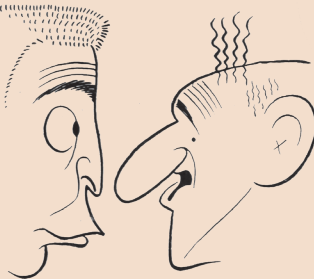
ence in the lives of children everywhere.

With success as a singer, dancer, piano player and actor on Broadway, in films, on radio and TV, he was said to reign in every venue and medium that he inhabited.

His raspy Brooklyn voice, comic chops and croaking ballads resulted in not only laughs but tears. His early trio partner, Lou Clayton, said, "You can warm your hands on this man." No one has ever been remotely like or in the league of the Great Schnozzola.

We miss you, Jimmy. 🎧

His early trio partner, Lou Clayton, said, "You can warm your hands on this man."



The thing I like about the Jimmy Durante-Garry Moore radio show is that if I'm not laughing at Durante, I'm laughing at Moore, and if I'm not laughing at either, there's always Georgia Gibbs to listen to.

—Dorothy Kilgallen,
"Voice of Broadway" January 11, 1944.



DESCRIPTION: Willard Farnum
PROGRAM: Flying Patrol
BROADCAST: Mon. through Fri., 5:30 p.m.,
EWT., BLUE Network.

ON FLYING PATROL

Willard Farnum decks out in the uniform of an ensign in the Coast Guard. He plays the role of Ensign Dan Blaine in Flying Patrol, dedicated to Coast Guard.

- - -

A look at a rare children's adventure series adapted from various NBC press releases and a review in the December 10, 1941, issue of *Variety*.

FLYING PATROL



IN THE ANNALS OF RADIO ENTERTAINMENT, the debut of *Flying Patrol* on the NBC-Blue serial lineup marked a significant juncture in the evolving tastes of young listeners. Premiering as a riveting thriller tailored for the adventurous souls among the youth, it emerged as a spectacle designed to tantalize the imaginations of thrill-seeking moppets. Authored by Jack LeFrandre, this electrifying addition to the airwaves endeavored to encapsulate the daring exploits of the Coast Guard air corps, soaring through treacherous storms and turbulent weather conditions along a sprawling expanse of coastline spanning over 40,000 miles.

The show's opening exposition laid bare its ambitious aim: to depict the valiant efforts of Coast Guardsmen as they combated law-breakers with unwavering resolve. Plausibility took a back seat in favor of an adrenaline-fueled narrative, where LeFrandre spared no effort in immersing listeners in a cacophony of roaring plane engines and frenzied skirmishes between the forces of justice and nefarious adversaries.

The characters and scenarios presented in *Flying Patrol* adhered strictly to the conventions of comic strips, with a penchant for employing an array of pseudoscientific contraptions that blurred the lines between reality and fantasy. Yet, such fantastical elements were embraced by the target audience, who reveled in the audacious and red-blooded escapades unfolding before their eager ears.

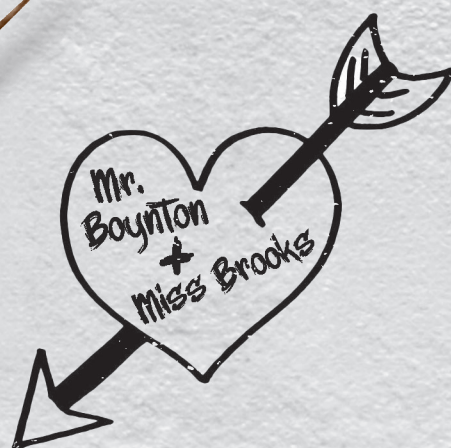
Despite the inherent limitations of radio production, *Flying Patrol* managed to carve out its own niche, albeit with varying degrees of success. Production values, often a critical factor in children's programming, were somewhat rudimentary, with the bulk of effort concentrated on the evocative drone of motor sound effects that bookended each episode. Performances, delivered with bold strokes by the cast, further contributed to the show's distinctive flair. While not reaching the heights of incredulity or melodramatic fervor seen in some contemporaneous productions, *Flying Patrol* nonetheless captivated a moderate audience with its blend of action and intrigue.

Behind the scenes, Alan Fishburn helmed the directorial duties, steering the sprawling ensemble cast through the twists and turns of each serialized adventure. The extensive roster of characters, though not fully utilized in every installment, lent a sense of depth and complexity to the unfolding narrative tapestry.

In retrospect, *Flying Patrol* stands as a testament to the enduring allure of serialized radio dramas in capturing the hearts and minds of young listeners. Its legacy endures as a relic of a bygone era, where the boundless expanse of the airwaves served as a gateway to realms of limitless imagination and unfettered excitement. 🎧

FUNNY BUSINESS

The Sitcom Approaches
the Century Mark



SAM'N'HENRY (Freeman Gosden and Charles Correll) was justly credited with launching a broadcast legacy that actively persists to this day. Starting January 12, 1926, the duo aired an amusing 10-minute exchange every day on Chicago's WGN radio. Critics eventually cited their efforts as giving birth to the broadcast situation comedy. The form ultimately dominated much of radio and TV as its popularity for humorous relief gained millions of fans.



BBETTER RECOGNIZED as *Amos 'n' Andy* following a moniker change in 1928, the two white comics behind it pretended to be black with earthy dialects to draw the listeners. After engaging the national chains, so accepted did the form become that movie theatres halted what was on their screens to air those radio performances live. And their staying power was so immense that nearly 35 years afterwards they continued to prompt ripples of laughter as Americans tuned to their nightly DJ series.

Sam 'n Henry (1926), *Amos 'n Andy* (1928), and *The Rise of the Goldbergs* (1929) were budding forerunners of a configuration that would attract legions after expanding into scores of flourishing broadcast and telecast features. This innovative genus exhibited similarities typifying every spinoff. Returning figures functioned in familiar surroundings, emblematic of situation comedies since. Yet it took Merriam-Webster a couple of decades to label the form *situation comedy* in descriptive terms.

In 1946: "A radio or television comedy series that includes a continuing cast of characters in a succession of episodes." And that source waited another 18 years before condensing *situation comedy* into a single dub, *sitcom*, in 1964. With few



Gertrude Berg as Molly Goldberg in *The Goldbergs*... a perfect example of a series that includes a continuing cast of characters in a succession of episodes.

parameters the dye was cast as early as Gosden and Correll, almost a century ago. Tickling a nation's funny bone was the result of scores of diversionary episodes to follow.

A TOTALLY NEW COMIC FORM. Radio historiographer Gerald Nachman captured an illuminating gist of the earliest years of ethereal sitcoms. Writing in 1998, he cited some qualities that led to the model's candid widespread acceptance: "Situation comedy was a totally new comic form. It ventured beyond crude gag-oriented sketches and involved listeners in middle-class lives not so unlike their own—simple homey incidents inflated into domestic farce . . ."

Radio was the massest of mass entertainment, and its audience mostly middlebrow and increasingly suburban, was amused and flattered at seeing itself reflected in shows that made light of its travails but never questioned the all-American family unit. *The Aldrich Family*, *A Date with Judy*, and *Vic and Sade* didn't know from divorced parents, single mothers, illegitimate kids, swinging singles, and biracial broods. Radio sitcoms didn't prattle on about the nuclear family because it had not yet been threatened.

As vaudevillians-turned-broadcasters faded from radio after

In 1946: "A radio or television comedy series that includes a continuing cast of characters in a succession of episodes." And that source waited another 18 years before condensing *situation comedy* into a single dub, *sitcom*, in 1964.

their jesting predominated through the 1930s, the sitcom readily took hold. It often became an amusing tactic for filling vacancies in the agendas of the four national chains. "The key to success in the 1940s was the development of a fallible, recognizable, sympathetic human character with whom listeners could warmly identify," Fred McDonald, yet another well-versed media pundit, insisted in 1991. Newly arriving headliners Corliss Archer, Archie Andrews, Judy Canova, and Chester A. Riley had no difficulty securing open spots in program itineraries.

In the final years of the 1940s the sitcom utterly blossomed prolifically. In that era of compelling features some of radio's largest and most faithful audiences discovered the new form's attractive structure. Debuting then, with premiering year in parentheses, were *My Friend Irma* (1947); *Junior Miss*, *Our Miss Brooks*, *Phil Harris and Alice Faye*, and *Life with Luigi* (all 1948); *My Favorite Husband* and *Father Knows Best* (both 1949).

Radio's dominance of the airwaves began to wane in the early 1950s as a small video screen arrived in American living rooms. The comedies that had matured with listening audiences paled into non-existence or may have tried to replicate their success on TV.

Ex-vaudevillians George Burns and Gracie Allen were highly successful radio performers who capably transferred their aural farce into a weekly video half-hour sitcom. It was an early sign to rival audio entertainers that—given the right property—that idea could succeed. Throngs of sitcoms became staples of early TV. And for a while, a few shows like *Our Miss Brooks* ran simultaneously in dual media.

CREAM RISES TO THE TOP. In 2003, legendary researcher Chuck Schaden, surveying a study of more than 160 radio sitcoms, created a list of what he determined were the



America's favorite radio family gets its first visualization in this 1949 comic book published by DC National Comics, publishers of *Superman*, also a radio program.

eight most popular features as the cream rose to the top. Each one was based on half-hour performances in an exclusively sitcom format. Over the long haul these

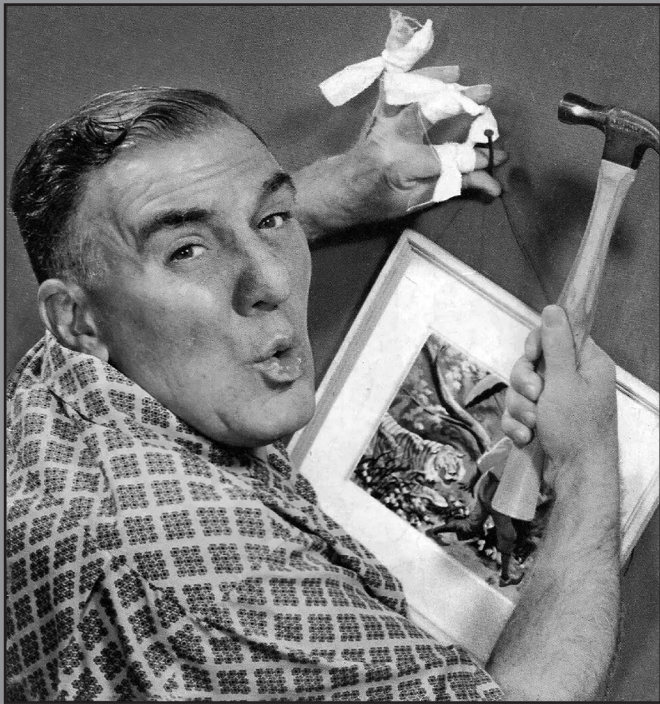
are Schaden's eight most admired shows in ranked order, bottom to top:

8. *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet*
7. *The Amos 'n' Andy Show*
6. *Blondie*
5. *Baby Snooks*
4. *The Great Gildersleeve*
3. *The Aldrich Family*
2. *Fibber McGee & Molly*
1. *The Jack Benny Program*

With a few exceptions like *Benny* and *Burns & Allen*, most sitcoms weren't headlined by personalities whose moni-



A visual reference for radio's subjective shenanigans of the Bumstead family from the daily and weekly comics of a bygone era. *Blondie* reached number six on Chuck Schaden's eight most admired shows.



As vaudevillians-turned-broadcasters faded from radio after their jesting predominated through the 1930s, the sitcom readily took hold. Newly arriving headliners included William Bendix as Chester A. Riley, a hapless husband fighting revoltin' developments in his domestic bliss, in *The Life of Riley*, and Janet Waldo as Corliss Archer, a young miss learning life's lessons the hard way, in *Meet Corliss Archer*.

kers begat instant recognition. The lion's share of the radio prototype usually starred people with "lesser" appellations such as Jim & Marian Jordan, Arthur Lake, and Hattie McDaniel.

Still harder to detect and devoid of much public adulation were fraternities of skilled artisans summoned for supporting roles in a surfeit of radio sitcoms. Aural thespians Bea Benaderet, Gale Gordon, Hans Conried, Arthur Q. Bryan, Lurene Tuttle, Richard Crenna, and Mary Jane Croft enjoyed long running roles as sidekicks and more in a multiplicity of features. Several could be heard on more than one series every week. They were practiced craftsmen and women with reliable dependability to their credit, sterling virtues that directors coveted. These "lesser" stars were routinely signed to enduring contracts.

MODIFIED SITUATION COMEDY. There might be sitcom purists out there who are troubled by the inclusion of series like *Fibber McGee & Molly* and *Jack Benny* in the celebrated class of broadcast sequencers. The miniscule handful of shows like them may be

branded "modified situation comedy." In a throwback to the vaudevillian heritage from which they sprang, these unique entries flaunted pleasant qualities of variety every week sparked by vocal and instrumental melody. Yet the songs were simply a sidelight to a humor-filled routine, the show's real draw.

You may rest assured that the defining elements of presenting a continuing theme or quest per installment were always there. The fact that personalities came and went in the *Benny* and *McGee* showcases doesn't negate the fact that the template qualified as true sitcoms. The middle commercial appeared in these series, too, another defining mark in the bulk of sitcoms with engaging storylines.

A shifting tide in mass communications could not sustain the original broadcast medium forever. Radio was essentially financing TV, the new kid on the block that would ultimately overtake it and make it a stepchild. It seemed like rotten recompense for radio's input. Even as a pervasive supplier of coast-to-coast wares that included so many trendy sitcoms, radio's abandonment was actually

a matter of time.

Before winding down this introspective into the legacy of the sitcom and its early and pervasive inception in broadcasting, examples of a couple of acclaimed series will illustrate the amusement offered to waiting ears. As an announcer declared for years on weekday afternoons in a cold vacuum, "Now, get ready to smile awhile." He was introducing *Lorenzo Jones* and his myriad hilarious foibles. Just as much fun were the calamities that encompassed *Fibber McGee & Molly* and *Our Miss Brooks*.

FIBBER MCGEE AND MOLLY. The mythical hamlet of Wistful Vista where the McGees resided hadn't been visited with advanced technology by the era their show was on the air. Hence, telephones remained bulky black desk units featuring rotary dials that were attended by operator-assisted calls, even when reaching out to a local party.

Thus, in rapid-fire tradition, McGee—an inventor of useless objects—frequently picked up the phone to ring an individual but initially had to go through a switchboard operator at the Wistful



At their peak the McGees were prominent on the radio dials of 48-million Americans weekly.

Vista telephone company. Repetitiously he'd hear a familiar voice (not overheard by the audience).

"Oh, izz-zat you, Myrt?" he'd ask. The live studio assemblage was already primed to dissolve into buoyant titters as they anticipated what was coming next, remembering many previous raucous occasions.

"How's every little thing, Myrt? . . . your brother did what? . . . fell down the stairs and smashed his face and broke off one of his hands? Oh, my gosh!"

Molly, habitually hearing McGee's side of the conversation, exclaimed: "Heavenly days! The poor lad . . ."

McGee finished the routine with Myrt by repeating aloud what she had said to him: "Dropped his watch again, eh?"

This carried the studio audience's giggles into thunderous, near riotous response. They supplied deafening applause while stomping their feet, exploding into uncontrollable state fits of laughter.

On another occasion McGee's riposte to Myrt was: "Your brother's up the river again, hunh, Myrt?"

"Heavenly days!" Molly reacted in despair.



Harold Peary as Gildersleeve, McGee's frustrated nemesis, who found success in a sitcom all his own.

McGee reiterated what Myrt had told him: "He's convinced the fishing is better up the river than around here, right?"

Yet on another occasion the set-up line McGee uttered was, "Your kid

brother, hunh? Broken back, hunh?"

To which Molly inquired, "Oh, heavenly days! What happened?"

McGee responded, echoing what he had just learned: "He was hitchhiking to the west coast and got as far as Peoria

and ran out of money, and now he's broke 'n' back, you say?"

Running gags like this filled a mirthful half-hour every week for almost two decades. Extensions of the original allowed the McGees to persist in quarter-hour episodes five nights weekly and finally in five-minute segments on *Monitor* on weekends. The couple was supported by a durable cast of brilliantly selected amusing figures in prime time. Included were Mr. Old-Timer, Wallace Wimple, Doc Gamble, Abigail Uppington, Mayor LaTrivia, Foggy Williams, Teeny, Throckmorton P. Gildersleeve, and Beulah. At their peak the McGees were prominent on the radio dials of 48-million Americans weekly.

OUR MISS BROOKS. Connie Brooks (Eve Arden) was the kind of English teacher everybody wished they had had. Mixing levity with dignity she leaned heavily into mirth and glee. The extraordinarily funny fiascoes she ushered in usually resulted in awkward entrapment for herself, sometimes of her own making, more often by a corps of well-meaning, at times dimwitted students at her beck and call.

Their shenanigans placed Miss Brooks in situations that frequently erupted into utter rampages of shattering amusement. Much of it involved the highly principled strait-laced no-nonsense principal of Madison High, Osgood Conklin (Gale Gordon). When her plans collapsed at his feet, Conklin could deliver punishment commensurate to any offense, leaving Miss Brooks withering on the vine.

Take, for example, an occasion aired in a 1950 episode geared to honoring the superintendent of schools, Edgar T. Stone, as he made his annual trek to Madison High. Principal Conklin meticulously planned for a pleasant outcome for the chief's stopover. Stone was to be treated

IN PERSON • ALL SHOWS TODAY!
Mr. GILDERSLEEVE
 Comedy Star of The Great Gildersleeve
 and The Fibber McGee and Molly Show
DOORS OPEN 11 A.M.

HELD OVER!
WE'RE MOW-WING 'EM DOWN MCGEE!
HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA

THE GOLDEN GATE IS ROCKING WITH THE ROARS OF CHEERING, LAUGHING CROWDS THAT DEMAND A 2nd RIOTOUS WEEK!
RKO GOLDEN GATE LOBBY WHOLE LAUGHING

Radio's Top Comic Stars!
EDGER BERGEN
 and **CHARLIE MCCARTHY**
FIBBER MCGEE and MOLLY
LUCILLE BALL
 Mrs. UPPINGTON
 Mr. GILDERSLEEVE

LOOK WHO'S LAUGHING
An RKO Radio Picture

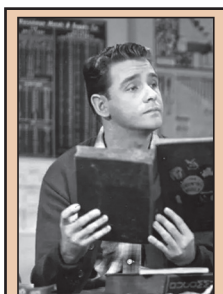
ALSO
 The same smash stage show stays too!
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 Featuring **STEVE EVANS**
Vaudeville's Great Mimic
STUMP and STUMPY
Terrific Dance Comics
DAVE MONAHAN and COMPANY
Master of the Whip
MICKEY KING
Song Stylists
SPENCER and DAVIS
Song Stylists
PEGGY O'NEILL'S BEAUTIES
CHAS. KALEY'S NEW MUSIC

PHONE ORIGIN 4841
"SAN FRANCISCO'S GREATEST SHOW VALUE"
RKO GOLDEN GATE

Fans of Fibber McGee and Molly got to see the couple in action in *Look Who's Laughing* with Edger Bergen and Charlie McCarthy plus a look at McGee's closet. In addition, one could meet Mr. Gildersleeve in person in San Francisco on November 19, 1941.

to an outdoor presentation involving the entire student body looking on. Conklin expected to convey that “all is well” at Madison High.

Of course, all was not well but Conklin didn’t know it. He had written an editorial for the school newspaper to be read aloud to Stone and the students titled “What the School Board Means to Me.” Without Conklin’s knowledge the print version was accidentally maligned in a freak accident prior to Stone’s arrival. Somehow it was left to a clueless Stretch Snodgrass to cut and paste together what was left. In doing so, he picked up another much more humorous manuscript that was also in tatters and combined the documents into one. None of it made sense of course but Snodgrass wasn’t the brightest bulb in the class.



Richard Crenna as dimwitted student Walter Denton. Crenna would reprise the role in both the television series and the 1956 film version of *Our Miss Brooks*.

Meanwhile, just before the editorial was to be read aloud, a batch of chemistry lab powder was fed into an outdated war cannon by practical joker Walter Denton. When it went off, Conklin, standing nearby, instantly became totally deaf. Not wanting Stone to know it he asked Miss Brooks to

read his editorial aloud, the substituted piece creating disaster as it poked fun at educational officialdom. Unaware, Conklin nodded his head and smiled appropriately as if he was hearing every word. By the end Stone left in a huff promising an investigation.

Afterwards, thinking Conklin still couldn’t hear (although he had regained his hearing completely), Miss Brooks decided to let her pent-up emotions go and to tell the principal precisely what she thought of him. “I’ve got some things to tell you that I’ve been saving up for years,” she began. “It’s going to be a pleasure to coo them into your dainty plugged-up ear.” Branding him an “inconsiderate, maladjusted, sub-human tyrant,” she scolded: “Rather than try

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The two Mr. Boyntons, Jeff Chandler on radio and Robert Rockwell on television and the 1956 film. Jeff Chandler went on to become a major player in 1950s films for Universal-International. Before becoming Mr. Boynton, Rockwell was menaced by commie infiltrators in *The Red Menace* (1949), and sired Kal-El (Superman) in TV’s *Adventures of Superman*.



When her students’ shenanigans placed Miss Brooks in situations that frequently erupted into utter rampages of shattering amusement, the highly principled strait-laced no-nonsense principal of Madison High, Osgood Conklin (Gale Gordon), delivered punishment, leaving Miss Brooks withering on the vine.



Radio takes on the Axis in 'Spy at Large'

ONE OF THE MORE ENIGMATIC RADIO SERIES to emerge during the tumultuous political events of 1938 was *Spy at Large*, a program worth a footnote in broadcast history. Premiering on March 27, 1938, just two weeks after

Nazi troops annexed Austria into the Third Reich, *Spy at Large* would prove anomalous to virtually every network and broadcast dictum of the era.

Radio networks were habitually loathed to be perceived by the public as taking sides on controversial topics, especially political issues. Neutrality was not only the practiced watchword for the Roosevelt Administration but the radio industry and, importantly, its listeners. Now, suddenly, *Spy At Large* popped up with a political agenda, clear to the most casual radio listener.

Originating from WJZ in New York City, NBC's Blue Network, *Spy at Large* defined its radio mission succinctly in press release material sent out to radio editors. Citing "events of the present-day world" as catalyst for the series, it was explained that "the central theme of the story is the menace to world peace of a certain foreign country, whose near bankruptcy has made its malevolent ruler desperate."

Radio Daily (March 30, 1938) posited some ideas of its own regarding this atypical series. *Radio Daily* described *Spy at Large* as an "unusually engrossing dramatic serial" and cited its production and continuity as "second to none." The reviewer, however, clearly wondered how the show made it to the air. "The very daring material is surprising inasmuch as the delicate situation between nations would seem to make it a touchy situation," *Radio Daily* continued. "For this reason alone it appears to the average dial twister that Washington itself is backing the series."

The premiere episode would prove to be eerily prophetic nearly four years later when America was forced into World War II. For purposes of the script, Great Britain and the United States had exchanged copies of highly secret plans to be used in the event of war. Britain released the Singapore Harbor defense plans while the United States provided Britain with plans for Pearl Harbor's defense. The documents were stolen, and it became the task of a reluctant, eccentric, but effective American agent, named Iliad Hopkins, to retrieve the plans, which he successfully accomplished. Each week, however, brought a new threat to world security and Iliad Hopkins would be called to duty.

Spy at Large would remain on the NBC-Blue schedule, warning listeners of a potential world-wide conflict. Playing out that year against

the backdrop of the Munich Crisis and the betrayal of Czechoslovakia, *Spy at Large* aired as a sustainer; no commercial sponsor chose to attach itself to the show. The series quietly left the airwaves shortly after the Munich Agreement was signed.



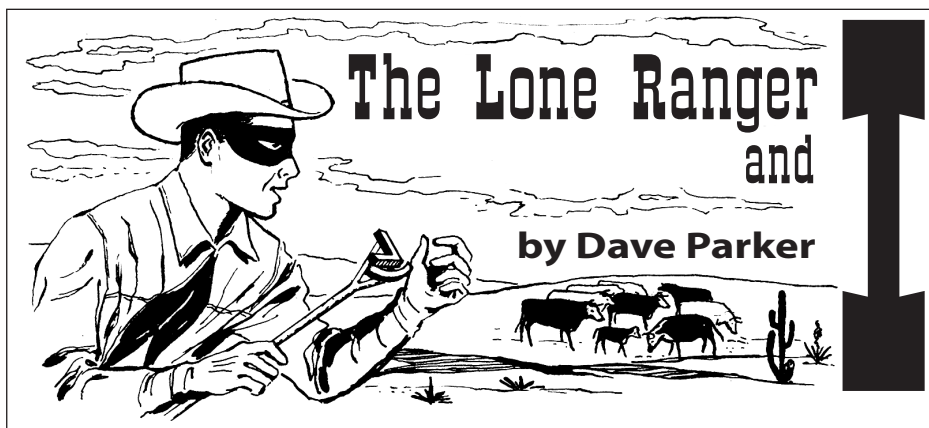
George P. Ludlam (pictured) wrote *Spy at Large*. A continuity writer with NBC until his resignation in January 1937, Ludlam left the network to join another former NBC employee, Frank Chase, to form their own radio production service, Chase and Ludlam. Ludlam would prove an intriguing figure in radio history over the ensuing years. He graduated from Harvard University in 1925 and once taught at MIT.

Among the radio packages prepared by Chase and Ludlam was the radio adaptation of *Superman* with Frank Chase producing the series and Ludlam turning out the scripts. Ludlam's was the only name to receive significant press mention relative to *Spy at Large*. An illuminating NBC press photo dated April 29, 1938, did offer a glimpse behind the production scenes during a rehearsal of the show. Joseph Bell is shown directing the series. The actor, Eric Dressler, is prominent at the microphone during dress rehearsal. While not specifically identified as Iliad Hopkins, it is

a reasonable assumption that Dressler played the role.

The impetus behind the production and airing of *Spy at Large* remains unknown. The series was clearly an outlier in the context of the era. Perhaps it is worth examining Ludlam's later career to formulate an opinion. Two months later (November 23, 1938) WJZ broadcast an hour-long program, *Messengers of Peace*, scripted by Ludlam, lauding the long and honorable history of the United States Department of State. The program included historical dramatizations and an address by Cordell Hull, the then Secretary of State.

By the time the United States entered World War II, Ludlam's radio credentials were more than sufficient to earn him the position of assistant radio director for the Office of Civilian Defense. In February 1943 he became chief of the special assignment section in the Office of War Information's radio bureau. The following year, Ludlam was promoted to chief of the OWI's radio division, a position that had enormous control over what went out over the airwaves during the war. After the war, Ludlam was a cofounder, vice-president and board member of the National Advertising Council until his retirement in 1969. He died in 1997 at the age of 94. Ludlam's influence on the history of radio encompassed several fronts and was profound.♣



Once Upon a Horse of a Different Color

REALLY ENJOYED the coverage of the Masked Man and his “shootout” with Al Jennings of Oklahoma. Working all those years for the Lone Ranger, uh, that is, for Trendle and company I had heard of many cases brought to the court involving ownership and rights of ownership of the Lone Ranger.

But one case in particular always intrigued me, and it was a tale told to me by Ray Meurer (as in Trendle-Campbell-Meurer Inc.) right from the horse’s mouth, you might say.

It seems that some jerk claimed that he had “the great horse Silver” and (of course) had to be sued by Trendle-Campbell-Meurer, Inc.

In the courtroom at trial “our” lawyer produced a paper bag with the declaration, “Ladies and gentlemen, I declare under oath that the great horse Silver couldn’t possibly be in the defendant’s stable because it is in this paper bag.” The defense pooh-poohed the claim and dared the prosecuting attorney to pull the great horse Silver out a plain paper bag.

To general astonishment he produced some coconut shells and toilet plungers, which as (almost) everyone knows were the essential sound effects of the great horse, Silver.

Case dismissed.

Hi -Yo Silver! 🐾

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FUNNY BUSINESS CONTINUED

to talk some sense into that addleheaded, mule-brained little head of yours ... you beady-eyed, beetle-browed old buzzard” She persisted in that with more incriminating epithets. “Does that make you happy?” she asked as she finished.

“Yes, Miss Brooks. That makes me very happy,” Conklin replied cryptically. After she fully grasped that he hadn’t missed a word she said, he haltingly meted out his words so nothing could be misunderstood: “You realize, of course, Miss Brooks, that any chastisement you have suffered in the past is mere child’s play when compared with what’s in store for you now?” By then, of course, the studio audience—and surely the listeners at home—had melted into gales of laughter, rollicking and rolling in the floor. It was the kind of routine that made *Our Miss Brooks* a riotous charade every time.

AS STATED ALREADY, sitcoms—at least in Radioland—never failed to tickle America’s funny bone. For millions of listeners the form provided a backbone for ethereal entertainment.

Can you believe that it will soon be around 100 years? 🐾

KEN MURRAY SAYS:



This naval limitations business received another setback the other day when the Soviet Union announced that it was going to build a Navy as large as Japan’s and Germany’s combined . . . something else to look forward to . . . “Red Sailors in the Sunset.”

Of course, what I can’t understand is how the Soviet ever expects to build up an efficient Navy . . . after all, you know a communist’s aversion to water.

I imagine another great difficulty will be in training their navigation officers to stand on the bridge . . . that is, unless they make them out of soap-boxes.

But don’t worry, folks! If the Communist Navy is anything like their speakers, it’ll most likely be composed entirely of windjammers.

May 1936



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