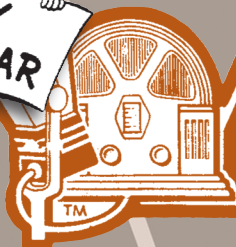




RDVAC SPOTLIGHT ON STEVE DARNALL • THE INTERNATIONAL CLUB CROSBY • THE GOSPEL SINGER

*sperdvac*



# **RADIOGRAM**

Volume 48 • Number 1

January/February 2025



**GROWING  
UP  
LISTENING  
TO  
JACK BENNY**



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## from the president

## GREETINGS SPERDVAC MEMBERS,

**I**T'S 2025. That number still startles me. But here we are, and there's much to discuss. So, let's get to it.

First, I have some sad news to share. Barbara Williams, the devoted wife of our longtime friend Jerry Williams, passed away late last year. Barbara was more than a supporter of SPERDVAC—she was a pillar. The smile at the registration desk that welcomed you, the steady hand that kept things running smoothly as secretary—Barbara was all of that and more.

She gave to this organization in ways that can't be measured, and for that, we are grateful. To her family, to her friends, and to those of us who were lucky enough to know her, we extend our deepest condolences. We are better for having had her among us.

Now, onto business. Specifically, our 2025 convention. Some of you have asked, "Why the fundraising? Didn't SPERDVAC used to just cover the cost?" Yes, it did. And in years past, when membership was strong—when we had 1800 active members—it was sustainable. But times change. And the first responsibility of this board, of any board, is to ensure that this organization endures. That means we don't spend money we don't have. It means that we don't take from operating funds that keep us going year after year. So, we made the choice to fund the convention through a crowdfunding campaign. It's not about nostalgia for how things used to be; it's about making sure we still exist in the future.

That brings me to another question that's come up: "Why is this convention so expensive?" Another excellent question. The short answer? Everything costs more now. Every flight, every hotel, every service we rely on has seen its price tag rise. And we don't have the volunteer base we once did. Every role we can't fill with a volunteer is a role we have to pay someone to do. Add to that the cost of transportation, insurance, staffing,

and, well, you get the idea. The board is actively exploring ways to make future events smaller and more cost-effective because, at the end of the day, our mission is about preservation. And it takes exactly zero talent to spend ourselves into extinction.

Now, let's talk about leadership. You've probably received your ballots for the 2025-2026 SPERDVAC board of directors. If you haven't voted yet, I ask that you take this responsibility seriously. Read the

bios. Consider the challenges ahead. We have some impressive new candidates this year, and the choices you make will shape SPERDVAC's future. Vote wisely.

And speaking of the future, you'll notice that two names are missing from the ballot this time around: Robert Tevis and mine. For the past five years, Robert has been an outstanding vice-president, and I've had the honor of serving as your president. But when you put your name forward for a board position, you're committing—not just to meetings, but to projects, committees, communications, legal obligations, and more. It's a lot. And in 2025, with increasing family and professional commitments, neither Robert nor I felt we could give this organization the time and energy it deserves. So, it's time to pass the torch.

Come March 2025, a new board will be seated, and new officers will be chosen. And while I may no longer be at the helm, I'll still be here, supporting this organization however I can. Because SPERDVAC isn't just about old-time radio. It's about storytelling, history, and all of you.

So, thank you—for your support, your dedication, and for being part of something worth preserving. 📻

Your president, 2020-2025—

*Timothy Knofler*





SPERDVAC  
SPOTLIGHT

# Steve Darnall

by Sean Dougherty

SPERDVAC MEMBERSHIP CHAIR

**W**ELCOME TO THE SECOND in a new ongoing feature of *Radiogram*, SPERDVAC MEMBER SPOTLIGHT. Each issue we'll highlight a member of SPERDVAC who is doing something exceptional in the classic radio / audio drama hobby, whether it is in research, preservation, re-creations, new audio dramas, writing and more! This issue's subject is Steve Darnall, a SPERDVAC member since 1992, the host of *Those Were The Days* radio show on WDCB Radio in Chicago and *Radio's Golden Age* on KXEL Radio in Cedar Rapids, IA and the publisher/editor of *Nostalgia Digest*, a bi-monthly magazine covering pop culture from golden ages of radio and Hollywood.

**Q. You took over hosting *Those Were the Days* radio and publishing *Nostalgia Digest* from the legendary Chuck Schaden. How did those transitions happen?**

Working with Chuck directly began for me in 1993. I'd been a fan of his for many years and that's when I had the idea to write an article for the *Nostalgia Digest* about Bob and Ray. Over the next decade I was an infrequent contributor to his publication. In the fall of 2004, Chuck contacted me because he'd been thinking about stepping away from the magazine and asked if I'd like to take it over. I thought about it for an evening and then I realized, "If I say no and the person who takes it over doesn't do a great job, I'm gonna be kicking myself for the rest of my life." So I decided to take the risk myself.

As far as [*Those Were the Days* radio] there wasn't any sort of real succession plan in place. But when Chuck reached out to me at the end of 2008 and announced he was planning to retire from broadcasting, I just thought that would be terribly sad because I knew a lot of people loved that show, myself included. We approached management at WDCB and told them, in effect, "Chuck is retiring but I'm taking over and that's who'll be hosting the show from now on." And that seems to have worked. I've been hosting the show now for a little over 15 years.

Chuck did it for 39 years—and as we all know, 39 is a great year to stop counting.

**Q. You don't have literal ratings at a public station, but in terms of the fundraising that's the closest you get to knowing how much people care about what you're doing, right?**

We're very fortunate in that we're on a public radio station where the management likes what we do and there isn't the pressure for ratings and demographics that there would be on a commercial station. Obviously the response we get during our fundraising drives is incredibly gratifying — and it tells

the management that "We're backing the right horse here."

**Q. For most of the time classic radio and the golden age of Hollywood have been hobbies, they have been supported by a large audience of people who lived through those eras—a time which has largely ended. How has that affected your audience?**

What's happened in a lot of cases is that the people who were listening to Chuck in the 70s and 80s and 90s turned their kids onto it; in a sense, we're reminding them of both the Golden Age of Radio and their own family history. There also are times when people stumble upon you and they're not tied to any demographic. But if somebody's turning the dial on his given Saturday and out comes *The Mysterious Traveler* or *The Jack Benny Program*, that's not an easy thing to turn away from.

One of the things I've been doing is public appearances, going to libraries and retirement homes to lecture about radio. In the process, you remind people that if you're enjoying these sounds, well, we're on the air every Saturday afternoon.

**Q. How have you changed the show (or the magazine) since you took over?**

The show has always tried to be a showcase for the totality of the golden age of radio. As Chuck said, there may be shows that some shows will age better than others but there are some you play because that was part of radio history and that's what you're trying to chronicle.

I don't blame anybody who says, "I'd rather listen to *Yours Truly*, *Johnny Dollar* than *Mr. Chameleon*" but sometimes you play the latter because it's part of radio history — and in the process, you can tell people, "This was a short-lived show and you might get an idea why it was short-lived."

That goal has allowed us to do some things that have ultimately proven to be pretty interesting. We did a month-long

salute to Chicago radio when the city turned 175. We did a 75th anniversary salute to World War II. A news broadcast from 1943 might not have the appeal of a Burns and Allen show or a Jack Benny program, but It's all part of that stew.

In terms of how things might have changed: Chuck is from the generation that lived these shows firsthand. I'm coming to them from more of a historical perspective. I can sit there and talk about the people who are part of the show and how maybe they went on to do a television show that more of the audience is familiar with. For instance, you could talk about Parley Baer being part of the cast of *Gunsmoke*, but you can also talk about him playing Mayor Stoner on *The Andy Griffith Show*.

**Q. So you reach another generation through later performances?**

You hope to provide relevance and and present it with enthusiasm, which is what Chuck did and what I try to do. And you also learn not everything has aged equally well and you

Obviously, people's definition of nostalgia is shifting and I did make an unofficial rule that I wasn't going to go up full-on Boomer. There have been enough things written about the Beatles, Elvis Presley, and *Easy Rider*.

have to be cognizant of that. It's never our intention to make someone listen to our show and feel bad.

**Q. How do you help this newer audience appreciate shows when the references, such as public figures of the day or archaic technologies like live telephone operators, are so foreign to them?**

I remember interviewing Bob Elliott, and he said one of the keys to their success was they worked in generalities—even if a character was based on Fiorella La Guardia, you didn't really need to know who he was to get the humor. The best shows from

classic radio are like that.

We were playing a *Have Gun Will Travel* show not long ago and of course that's 1959 and the golden age of radio was winding down, but during that time if you were still doing radio it was because you loved it and you were really good at it.

**Q: So for *Nostalgia Digest*, what are some things you've done as the editor to keep it vital?**

Well, "vital" is in the eye of the beholder, but after I took over as publisher, we started working with distributors and now we're in several hundred bookstores nationwide, which is a luxury the magazine didn't enjoy for its first 30 years. That in turn, has allowed us to reach audiences who otherwise would not have known to tune into a public radio station in the suburbs of Chicago.

Obviously, people's definition of nostalgia is shifting and I did make an unofficial rule that I wasn't going to go up full-on Boomer. There have been enough things written about the Beatles, Elvis Presley, and *Easy Rider*. Maybe someday that becomes a bridge that has to be crossed. But one of the things I'm really proud of is that we've been able to fill the magazine with content related to the golden age of entertainment, and hopefully you find a way to make that relevant to new audiences. You take steps like putting recognizable stars like Lucille Ball or Kirk Douglas on the cover. The days when we would have put Elliott Lewis on the cover are over but we still run articles about Elliott Lewis and how many publications can say that?

I also published a swimsuit issue in 2007, which I've joked about doing at every publication I've worked for. It seemed like a novel and fun way to explore the glamour that people associate with that golden age of Hollywood — and readers seem to agree, because we've gone on to publish six of them. We even did a *Nostalgia Digest* podcast for about eight years, which was devoted to people and topics we'd covered in the magazine. We produced a hundred of them and they're still available at [nostalgia digest.com](http://nostalgia digest.com)

**Q. Thanks for taking the time to speak with us and for being a member of SPERDVAC!**

Thank you. I have to say that SPERDVAC has been a big part of my life for a good number of years. I became a member in 1992. Just having access to the library — what an amazing experience! To know that these things existed, and someone had them in such quantity was so amazing. I'm grateful for SPERDVAC. They've been flying this flag for a good long time.🐾



*Nostalgia Digest*, celebrating 30-years, available at your favorite bookstore.

## The International Club Crosby

# Where the Blue of the Night Meets the Gold of the Day

by Perry Huntoon

AMERICAN VICE PRESIDENT ICC

**S**PERDVAC MEMBERS are generally quite aware of the role Bing Crosby played in the growth of network radio in the early 1930s and the dominance he had in the medium as an entertainer. The immense popularity achieved by Bing led directly to the establishment of the longest-lasting fan club in the world as recognized by the Guinness Book of World Records. And it all began when Bill Paley, head of the Columbia Broadcasting System, heard Bing's recording of *I Surrender Dear* while sailing across the Atlantic on the SS *Europa* in the summer of 1931.

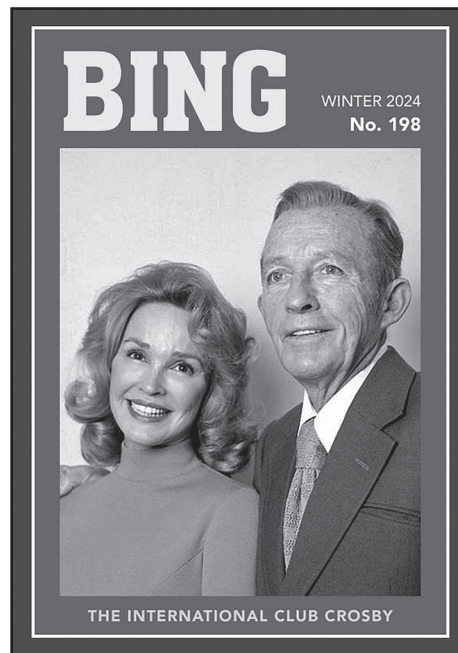
Bing had achieved some popularity as a singer through his association with Paul Whiteman's orchestra between 1926 and 1930. Following his departure from Whiteman, Bing opted to remain in southern California and joined the Gus Arnheim orchestra, which was ensconced at the famous Coconut Grove in the Ambassador Hotel of Los Angeles, the site of the assassination of Robert Kennedy in 1968. With Arnheim, Bing recorded eleven tunes, several highly popular, but the popularity was largely confined to the West Coast. He also made film appearances starring in several Mack Sennett comedy shorts. Radio was next and Bing's brother Everett, who was managing Bing's affairs, mailed two recordings of Bing to Paley in hopes of gaining an audition for a 15-minute show over the Columbia Broadcasting System. The records never reached Paley as he had sailed to Europe, but fate was on Bing's side. Paley heard Bing's voice coming from a neighboring compartment, found out who was singing and wired headquarters in New York for information about Crosby. Apprised of the singer's popularity in California, Paley offered

the astronomical sum of \$1,500 per week (equivalent to about \$28,500 in 2024) for a daily 15-minute sustaining show. Bing's first show for the network was scheduled for Monday night, August 11, at 11 p.m., Eastern time. However, purportedly due to an attack of laryngitis, the opening show was delayed

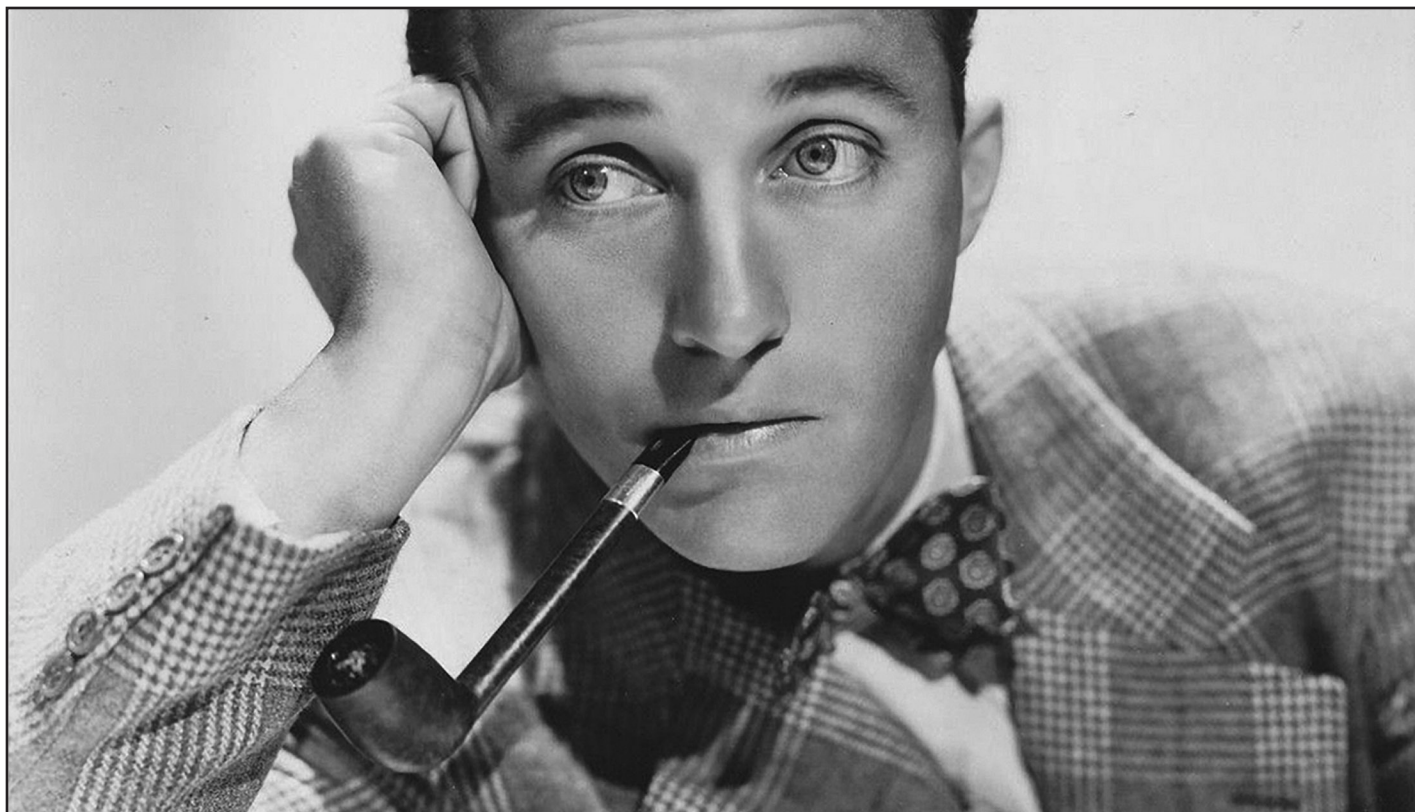
to September 3. The nationwide CBS broadcasts brought nationwide attention to Bing and, after two months of sustaining programs, also brought Certified Cremo cigars as a sponsor. The Cremo broadcasts gave Bing even more exposure and particularly to women. Ultimately, Cremo failed to renew Bing's contract, apparently finally realizing that women don't smoke cigars. After a seven month hiatus, Bing was back on the air for the first four months of 1933 sponsored by Chesterfield. Woodbury Soap came on later and in late 1935, Bing was offered the *Kraft Music Hall* on NBC, which became one of radio's biggest shows with Bing hosting it until 1946.

With Bing supreme on radio, records and film, it was inevitable that a fan club would be born. Fan clubs were coming into vogue in the 1920s and exploded in

the 1930s with the advent of sound in the film industry. Artists like Shirley Temple had a huge following. It was only natural that Bing, now both a film and recording star, would also develop a following. In 1936, Club Crosby was formed, and soon thereafter, a quarterly mimeographed 10-page periodical, *Bingang*, was distributed to members. Bing and his brother Larry supported the club and it grew with branches in Canada and Australia being formed after World War II. The presidents were all female until 1980 when Al Sutton of Sacramento took over as president and editor. The club gradually lost its Bobby







Soxer image and became an organization of collectors and fans that were interested in serious research into Bing's life and career with an emphasis on the recording career. In 1987, Mark Scrimger of Michigan was named president with Wayne Martin of Missouri as vice president and editor. Al, Mark and Wayne all contributed to turning *Bingang* into a more scholarly publication with detailed research on Bing's career.

As a result of his support during the war and travel to the England in 1944 to entertain the troops, Bing was hugely popular there. This led to the formation in 1950 of the British Bing Club by a group of admirers. This club also received the blessing of Bing and Larry. Through the early years it published a periodical titled *Crosby Post*. A major accomplishment was the publication in 1957 of a Crosby discography. A reorganization in 1965 brought about a change in name to the International Crosby Circle and an improved magazine simply titled *Bing*. After a quarter century of operating as a traditional fan club, the ICC was reorganized in 1989 with a new management team consisting of Michael Crampton as secretary/treasurer and Ken Crossland followed by Malcolm Macfarlane as editor of *Bing*.

In 2002, with Wayne wishing to retire from active involvement of Club Crosby and no clear successor for his position, the idea of merging the two clubs was born. After extensive discussions, it was agreed that the clubs would merge and be

renamed the International Club Crosby with *Bing* becoming the surviving publication and Malcolm and Michael the principal managers. Greg Van Beel of Wisconsin became American co-editor of the publication. In the two decades since the merger, the club has been successful in publishing a high quality glossy

*Bing* three times per year. The publication is considered as a wealth of information regarding Bing's career, and it serves as a primary goal for preserving Bing's memory and career. In addition, the club has produced discographies of Bing's recording career, books detailing Bing's films, radio and television shows and has worked with Bing Crosby Enterprises and record producers to issue CDs of previously unheard renditions of tunes from Bing's radio and film work.

We invite SPERDVAC members to join the ICC and help continue to preserve the legacy of the most popular entertainer of the first half of the 20th century and share in the joy of keeping the music alive and in the public eye.

Dues are \$35 on a calendar year basis.

I am the American vice president of the club and handle membership concerns here. I can be reached at [phuntoon38@gmail.com](mailto:phuntoon38@gmail.com). Dues can be paid at that address via PayPal or by check made payable to me and sent to the following address: Perry Huntoon, 1047 Mattande Lane, Naperville IL 60540. We welcome your participation in honoring this American legend. 🎵



# GROWING UP LISTENING

*Professional  
Memories*





# ING TO JACK BENNY



Unlike his competitors who delivered their jokes themselves, Jack was the target of barbs and insults aimed at him by a group of familiar characters who just “dropped by” each week.

by Robert L. Mills

**J**ACK BENNY hosted his first radio show in 1932, five years before I was born. As soon as I was old enough to listen to the radio, I was attracted to the many comedy programs, mostly shows with variety formats hosted by veteran vaudeville-trained performers like Bob Hope, Edgar Bergen, Ed Wynn, and Fred Allen. But Benny had honed his show into a unique comedy machine that soon became my favorite. Unlike his competitors who delivered their jokes themselves, Jack was the target of barbs and insults aimed at him by a group of familiar characters who just “dropped by” each week.

The show began with his now-familiar “Love in Bloom” theme over which the announcer would reel off the names of cast members Mary Livingston, Rochester, Phil Harris, Dennis Day and “yours truly” Don Wilson. Then came Don’s introduction of Jack which would include a set-up for a routine or describe the opening scene.

**DON:** *Well, it’s the final show of the season so the cast is eagerly anticipating their time off from that notorious slave driver, the modern version of Captain Bligh himself . . . Jack Benny!*

Applause would echo through the NBC studio at Sunset and Vine as Jack greeted his fans which, by this time, were legion.

**JACK:** *Thank you . . . thank you . . . Captain Bligh, huh? If you’re not careful, I’ll have you thrown overboard and used as an emergency flotation device!*

Don’s weight was familiar joke fodder, much like Jack’s age, stinginess, and out-of-tune violin playing. Another rich source

of humor was the band members’ prodigious drinking habits.

**DON:** *I’m just kidding, Jack. You know we’ll all miss you . . . actually, my wife and I have reservations on the Lureline sailing to Honolulu this summer.*

**JACK:** *Hawaii, huh? Ask Phil to wake up Remley and he’ll teach you to play the ukulele.*

Frankie Remley played the guitar in Phil Harris’s band and also was his closest friend. Frankie would become a regular on the Phil Harris and Alice Faye Show played by character actor Elliott Lewis. The new show was radio’s first spinoff.

**DON:** *It’s our first time in Hawaii. I’m really looking forward to learning how to dance the hula.*

**JACK:** *Don, just picturing you doing the hula reminds me of an earthquake preparedness film.*

**DON:** *We also have reservations to attend a luau. You know where they roast a pig in the ground.*

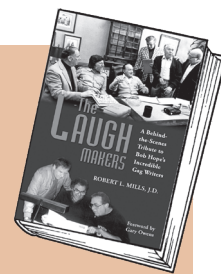
**JACK:** *You’re lucky I have a rule against doing two fat jokes in a row.*

Jack’s writers—which numbered around five over the show’s 23-year-run—were adept at giving Jack what was referred to as a “topper,” a line that would add yet another laugh to the existing one. This was also called “milking a line.”

**DON:** *Heh, heh, I’ll take both as compliments, Jack, but all kidding aside, do you have any vacation plans?*

**JACK:** *Well, I’ll be playing a lot of golf at Hillcrest and Rochester has been checking out airline tours to Paris*

As Bob says, “I was such a fan of radio, as a kid I gradually developed an ear for the delivery of radio comedians that led to my joining Bob Hope’s staff in 1977, preceded by a season writing for the Dean Martin Celebrity Roasts. I spent the next 15 years traveling the globe with Hope and co-writing 85 of his TV specials.” Bob is the author of *The Laugh Makers*, published by BearManor. Monologue excerpted from a re-creation of *The Jack Benny Program* written by Robert L. Mills and produced on Project Audion.com by Larry Groebe. Copyright © 2024 by Robert L. Mills





Jack surrounded by those familiar characters who just happen to drop by to offer insults: Eddie “Rochester” Anderson, the long-suffering valet; Dennis Day, the eternal kid; Phil Harris, the cool hipster-ready-to-party band leader; Mary Livingstone, the long-suffering girlfriend; Jack; Don Wilson, the heavy announcer; and Mel Blanc, “Professor LeBlanc,” long-suffering violin teacher among many other characters.

and Rome.

**DON:** *Either one sounds great. When will you decide?*

This is a straight line for the arrival of Mary Livingstone. Each member of the cast appeared out of nowhere and just began talking. Audience familiarity with the characters removed the necessity of introductions.

**MARY:** *When Pan Am or United announces their annual Summer Sale.*

Mary was Mrs. Jack Benny in real life but was never referred to as such on the air. Jack supposedly lived by himself (in a Beverly Hills mansion next door to the Ronald Colemans) with his valet, Rochester, played by Eddie Anderson.

**JACK:** *That has nothing to do with it and you know it . . . when did you come in, Mary?*

**MARY:** *Somewhere between Paris, Rome, and Waikiki.*

Mary’s undefined relationship with Jack allowed her to deliver put-downs like her reference to a summer sale, obviously labeling Jack a spendthrift. Mary’s radio voice had a sarcastic edge which sometimes made her sound as if

she’d actually prefer being somewhere else. Jack had discovered her behind the lingerie counter at the May company and she reportedly never really warmed up to being in show business much less starring on a popular weekly show.

**SFX:** *PAPER RUSTLES*

**JACK:** *What have you got there?*

**MARY:** *A letter from my mother. I haven’t had a chance to open it yet.*

Mary’s “letters from home” became a regular bit on the show. She would read them as Jack eagerly awaited news of how he was doing in the hinterlands. Occasionally, she would be asked to read a poem she’d written.

**JACK:** *Well, let’s all hear what she has*

*to say.*

**MARY:** *Okay . . . (Opens envelope) Let’s see . . . She writes “Dear Mary, we all watched last week’s show and enjoyed it very much . . .*



**YESSSS!** Frank Nelson often graced Jack’s radio and television shows, embodying the ultimate heckler. Whether as a railroad conductor, ticket agent, or bureau representative, he assumed authoritative roles that would unrelentingly hassle poor Jack. In this episode, he takes on the role of a department store floor worker in Jack’s TV version of the classic Christmas shopping special.



*JACK: They enjoyed it . . . good, good.*

So far, the letter sounds innocent and homey, but the audience knows the Insult Express is barreling down the track and they can't wait for it to arrive at Jack's stop.

*MARY: Your sister Babe and I especially liked the sketch . . .*

*JACK: That was "Witness for the Prosecution."*

*MARY: . . . especially the scene in the British courtroom when Mr. Benny was wearing that white wig.*

*JACK: It did make me look distinguished.*

The writers' long buildup has set the bait on what the audience knows is a sharp hook just waiting for Jack to take a bite out of.

*MARY: It looked so much nicer than that cheap thing he calls a toupee."*

*JACK: Now she's doing hair and make-up. . . Does she say anything else?*

*MARY: We read that the English-speaking Japanese listen to your show on Armed Forces Radio and it was reviewed in the Entertainment Section of the Tokyo Tribune.*

*JACK: Tribune, huh? Wonder what they said.*

Again, Jack's insatiable vanity kicks in and he can't resist requesting more details which the audience knows will somehow backfire on him.

*MARY: . . . they said Mary Livingston should be given more lines.*

*JACK: Now cut that out! You added that yourself!*

This expletive was one that Jack used often and became as familiar to listeners as the Great Gildersleeve's "LeeeeeRoy!" or Mayor LaTrivia's "McGeeeee!" The writers knew it would produce a surefire laugh and often tagged sketches with it.

*MARY: Should I keep reading?*

*JACK: No, I've heard enough. I love it when your mother gets more laughs than my writers.*

Jack was one of the first stars on radio to refer openly to his writers and they became a rich source of material, although, unlike most comics, he never blamed them when a line failed to get the expected laugh. He often salvaged the joke by blaming himself for choosing it.

*DENNIS: How come I never get to take a vacation?*

*JACK: Oh, hello, Dennis. I didn't hear you come in. You get the whole summer to go wherever you want.*

*DENNIS: Now you tell me.*

Dennis Day had been Jack's singer on the show since its early days, save for several seasons when he served in the war and was replaced temporarily by Kenny Baker. Though middle-aged, he sounded like a naive youngster who lived with his mother who didn't think Jack paid him enough.

*MARY: Dennis, you mean you haven't been taking a vacation every summer?*

*DENNIS: No . . . unless you count sleeping in a tent.*

*MARY: Camping is wonderful, Dennis!*

*Where do you camp out, the mountains, Lake Arrowhead, Big Bear?*

*DENNIS: I pitch a tent in the NBC parking lot and wait for the new season to start.*

Despite his naivety and child-like demeanor, Dennis Day (real name: McNulty) was a good actor so Jack used him in sketches playing roles from Scout Masters to Nazis.

*SFX: PHONE RINGS*

*JACK: (lifts receiver) Hello.*

*ROCHESTER: Hello, Mr. Benny, this is Rochester.*

A segment with Rochester was often included by phone in which we hear both ends of the conversation with Rochester's



Mary's undefined relationship with Jack allowed her to deliver put-downs like her reference to a summer sale, obviously labeling Jack a spendthrift. Mary's radio voice had a sarcastic edge which sometimes made her sound as if she'd actually prefer being somewhere else. Jack had discovered her behind the lingerie counter at the May company and she reportedly never really warmed up to being in show business much less starring on a popular weekly show.





Move over Gracie Allen, banner promotes Jack Benny as the 1944 Republocrat nominee for President of the United States of America direct from the national convention in Portland, OR courtesy of KGW. 'Twas all in fun, of course. KGW staged the event for the Benny troupe when it performed in Portland in June 1944. It was said that Jack accepted the nomination but later withdrew because the job didn't pay enough.

voice unfiltered. As Jack's employee, he just couldn't "drop by."

**JACK:** *We're doing the show right now, Rochester. What is it?*

**ROCHESTER:** *Pan American Airways*



Phil Harris had been Jack's band leader for 16-years until he was replaced by Bob Crosby when he landed his own show with his wife, Alice Faye, on CBS (with Jack's full blessing).

*just called.*

**MARY:** *(aside) We have a winner!*

**ROCHESTER:** *That flight to Paris you wanted is available.*

**JACK:** *Is it their "Tourist Class Super-Saver Special"?*

**ROCHESTER:** *That's the one!*

**JACK:** *Good . . . good. What time do we land?*

**ROCHESTER:** *You don't actually land, boss . . . They parachute you onto the top of the Eiffel Tower.*

**JACK:** *Well, remember to pack my earmuffs. It could get nippy up there.*

**ROCHESTER:** *Will do! Goooooooood-bye.*

**SFX:** *PHONE HANGS UP*

Rochester was so close to Jack on the show, some fans believed he was his valet in real life. Jack once told an interviewer "He's not only not my valet, I drive a Maxwell and he drives a Rolls-Royce!"

**PHIL:** *(bursts in) Hi, ya, Jackson! What'd I miss? I was busy changing the bulbs in my dressing room mirror.*

Phil always arrived like a tornado gathering strength. He never used Jack's first name, always addressing him as "dad" or "Jackson." His use of the English language was atrocious but fit his character

as the carefree, always ready-to-party, musician. Ever the cool hipster, he referred to civilians as either "Clyde" or "Gertrude."

**JACK:** *Changing your bulbs? Why do you care?*

**PHIL:** *Couple of burnouts and I can't truly appreciate the depth of these adorable dimples!*

Phil had been Jack's band leader for 16-years until he was replaced by Bob Crosby when he landed his own show on CBS (with Jack's full blessing).

**MARY:** *We were just discussing our vacation plans, Phil. Will you and Alice be renting a motor home again this year?*

**PHIL:** *Not likely, Livvy, after what happened last time.*

**JACK:** *What happened?*

**PHIL:** *Well, we took the kids on a tour of the national parks and when we got to Mt. Rushmore, somehow I got lost in Teddy Roosevelt's mustache (fades). When I didn't come back, Alice panicked and called the park rangers. And then . . .*

Flashbacks were used often to launch the sketches, with Jack or one of the cast recalling something that had happened. Here, Phil's entire family was involved so





Postcards circa 1935 show Jack and Mary in their early days of radio.



Alice Faye and the actors who played their kids were guests on the show.

**SFX: MOTORHOME HUMMING ALONG**

**ALICE:** (angrily exasperated) I won't say I told you so, but what were you thinking, Phil?

**PHIL:** I was just looking for some shade up there!

**ALICE:** Well, you should have stayed with us in Lincoln's nostril. Lincoln has the shadiest nostrils of all the presidents.

**PHIL:** I was trying to get a better view of the park and lost my bearings, that's tall. Sorry you kids had to see that . . . your dad being hoisted onto a rescue helicopter and everything.

**ALICE:** I thought it was so nice of the tourists to applaud like that.

**PHIL:** It's only natural. My fans hate seeing me in danger . . . Besides, it was all the pilot's fault. He took a sharp turn I wasn't ready for . . . and someone left the door open.

Phil often referred to his "adoring fans," yet more evidence of his conceit, the source of plenty of ribbing from Jack and Alice as well.

**LITTLE ALICE:** Oh, mommy, look! A Christmas parade!

**ALICE:** Where?

**PHYLLIS:** Back there! See all the colored lights?

**SFX: (OFF) SIREN**

**ALICE:** I think you'd better pull over, Phil.

**PHIL:** I see 'em honey . . . now don't panic, kids, your dad's in charge and will do all the talkin'! Just relax and act natural. They got nothin' on us! They'll never take us alive!

**ALICE:** Oh, Phil, don't scare them like that.

Phil showed no signs of his domineering braggadocio when it came to the

girls. He was a caring, devoted father and doted on them, but unlike David and Ricky Nelson who played themselves on the Ozzie and Harriet Show, the Harris girls were played by actors.

**SFX: BUS DOOR OPENS**

**PHIL:** (nervous innocence) Good afternoon, officer.

**COP:** Good afternoon. Who's the captain of this big boy?

**ALICE, PHYLLIS, LITTLE ALICE:** He is!

**PHIL:** I'm in charge here and I take full responsibility for whatever we're guilty of! Was I driving recklessly? Speeding? Did I cross over the double yellow line? Run over a deer? Miss a stop sign? Fail to yield the—

**COP:** (interrupts) Oh, nothing like that, sir. We recognized you from the six o'clock news. You're the guy who got lost in Teddy Roosevelt's mustache. Would you mind having your picture taken with us for the cover of our annual calendar?


**JACK BENNY** broadcast his final radio show on May 22, 1955. The program continued on television with a more conventional variety format without his regular cast and it never captured the unique magic that radio had provided and that he would never duplicate. 📻

*Sunday* **JACK BENNY**

**15<sup>th</sup> YEAR ON THE AIR**

WITH  
MARY LIVINGSTONE • PHIL HARRIS  
ROCHESTER  
DENNIS DAY • DON WILSON

HELLO FOLKS!  
ANOTHER YEAR BUT  
THE SAME JACK BENNY  
. . . YOUNG, HANDSOME,  
GENEROUS AND MODEST.  
I'LL TELL YOU MORE  
SUNDAY!



**Every Sunday  
7 PM WIS**

PRESENTED BY **LUCKY STRIKE • L.S./M.F.T.**

Columbia (SO) Record October 5, 1946



# 'Deeply Religious But Not Prudishly so'

Edward MacHugh's non-denominational broadcasts proved a regular part of radio's culture for a generation of faithful listeners

ONE OF THE MOST recognizable voices during radio's golden age belonged to a Scotsman named Edward MacHugh. Blessed with a rich baritone voice, MacHugh turned up on American radio by a rather circuitous path.

Born in Dundee, Scotland, in 1893, he emigrated to Canada in 1912 along with his widowed mother and several other family members. Edward took work wherever he could find it. One day in 1912, he was acting as an usher and taking tickets at Montreal's Royal Hunt Club. A reception was underway for the Governor General of Canada when a frantic woman, one of the organizers of the reception, hurried up to Edward, asking if he could sing. Someone was urgently needed to sing "God Save the King." Edward's performance impressed the Governor General's wife, and she offered him another chance to sing the next day. The upshot of these impromptu engagements would be a trip to London where he received voice training at the Royal College.

World War I would complicate Edward's education but after the war, he eventually found his way back across the Atlantic and ended up in the United States. He traveled with a theatre group based on the east coast. After five years the troupe disbanded, and Edward secured a job at the Houghton & Dutton department store in Boston. Around this same time, Houghton & Dutton decided to extend its advertising reach throughout the New England area with a radio presence on station WEEL. MacHugh soon found a receptive audience performing as the "Radio Baritone." Edward began to explore what sort of songs best defined him as a vocalist. He discovered the public was particularly responsive whenever he performed gospel songs. While still at WEEL, MacHugh first sang "The Old Rugged Cross" by George Bernard. The overwhelming public reaction to MacHugh's performance encouraged him to take a new musical direction. Thereafter, wherever and whenever he performed, the public would beseech him to perform the hymn. By 1937, *Radio Guide* (October 30, 1937) would claim that MacHugh's radio performances had "engraved [the hymn] upon the hearts of millions." He had lifted a modest hymn from the pages of hymnals and made it famous.

By 1929, MacHugh was being billed as "The Gospel Singer" in radio listings and had moved over to station WBZ which enabled him to be heard across a wide swath of New England. The wider exposure would also eventually catch the interest of a network and commercial spon-



sor. In 1933 MacHugh was picked up by NBC-Blue to broadcast his program, *Your Gospel Singer*, on a sustaining basis out of WJZ in New York. He would eventually land Ivory Soap as a sponsor. *Variety* (April 17, 1934) summed up MacHugh's radio presence as a "robust, mellifluous baritone, with a repertoire of strictly sacred songs—hence the billing—which undoubtedly fills a vital necessity for a certain type of conservative radio audience." The reviewer went on to suggest that the tin-pan alley crowd might find it surprising to discover that MacHugh's numbers tended to be "spirited and infectious" which demonstrated "good showmanship."

While MacHugh took his audiences and his message seriously, he was hardly the dour conservative figure that might have been implied in *Variety*. Indeed, a profile of "The Gospel Singer" in the June 1940 issue of *Radio Varieties* depicted him as a "genial man, ruddy-faced and blessed with one of life's greatest gifts—a sparkling sense of humor . . . deeply religious but not prudishly so."

MacHugh would typically begin each broadcast singing the first stanza from "An Evening Prayer." He would follow up with the names of one or two individuals who had come to his attention in need of a prayer or helping hand. When the United States entered World War II, MacHugh's morning broadcasts took on an even greater dimension for his avid listeners. His was a daily voice raised in songs filled with faith and hope offering a deliberate counterbalance to the incessant daily news coverage of battlefield deaths and atrocities. As MacHugh interpreted them, "A hymn is not just an excuse for music, a hymn is a message. It has a philosophy that helps people as much as fresh air, sunshine or any of the vital things in life."

After the war, syndicator Harry S. Goodman released 420 15-minute episodes of MacHugh's broadcasts under the title, *Your Gospel Singer*. MacHugh's NBC coast-to-coast series had come to an end. He was slowly easing into semi-retirement. Some limited radio performances and public appearances continued. For a while in the early 1950s, MacHugh even maintained a presence on a few New England television stations.

Edward MacHugh died on February 3, 1957; he would be remembered in media reports and by radio audiences as simply, "The Gospel Singer." His non-denominational broadcasts proved a regular part of radio's culture for a generation of faithful listeners. ♪



RADIO AT THE MOVIES • 80 YEARS AGO

## All-Star Array Great in New Allen Comedy



A ROSTER OF STARS, which reads like the who's who of screen and radio, was assembled to surround Fred Allen in the new comedy extravaganza, *It's in the Bag*, coming to the Hollywood today through Wednesday.

This all-star array includes Don Ameche, Binnie Barnes, Robert Benchley, William Bendix, Jack Benny, John Carradine, Jerry Colonna, Victor Moore, William Terry, Sidney Toler and Rudy Vallee.

No commodity is more welcome these days than a rip-snorting comedy, and that is exactly the sort of entertainment provided. The hilarious highlights of a dozen Fred Allen radio shows seem to be pack-jammed together in an incredibly fast-moving plot which has lurid dramatic suspense and more comical situations than one can remember.

In his last picture, four years ago, Allen was co-starred with his traditional adversary, Jack Benny. In *It's in the Bag*, they resume their feud during one amazing and amusing sequence in which Benny plays himself and Allen poses as president of a Jack Benny fan club. Benny plays the tightwad in these scenes and takes a ruthless ribbing.

Most of the story conflict, however, centers on Allen and Benchley, who portray, respectively, the impresario of a flea circus and a professional insect exterminator. Eventually, Benchley's son, enacted by Terry, and Allen's daughter, played by Gloria Pope, a newcomer, provide the romantic interest and further complicate the rivalry between the fathers.

Miss Barnes romps through the film as Allen's wife; Bendix, with a vitamin complex, is the head of a band of gangsters with whom Fred gets involved over an inheritance; Carradine is a colorful shyster who adds to the comic menace; Colonna plays a psychiatrist retained by Binnie to help straighten out the Allen family's troubles.

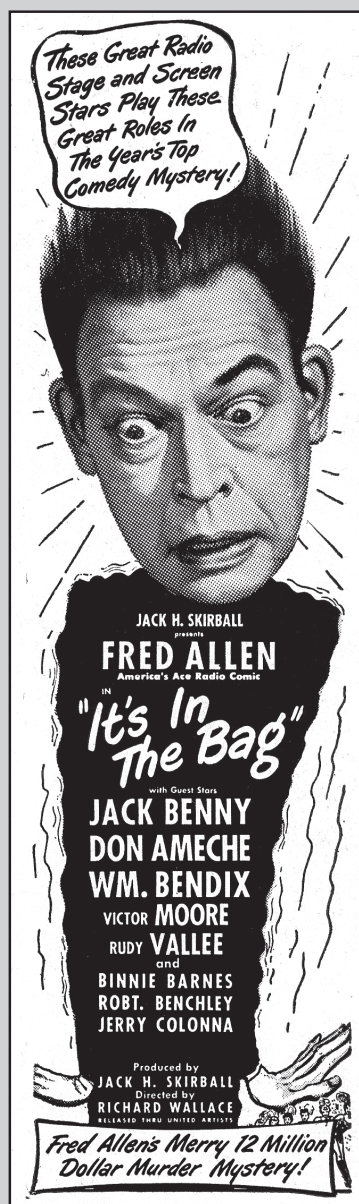
Harry Von Zell, noted radio announcer, makes his screen debut in Fred Allen's sensational new comedy *It's in the Bag*. Von Zell makes his film bow as proprietor of a nightclub, and he and Allen, who are friends of long standing, have several amusing scenes together.

The famous "Mrs. Nussbaum," often heard but not seen, is unveiled for all to see and hear in, *It's in the Bag*. Mrs. Nussbaum, familiar to all radio listeners, has been featured the past decade on the Fred Allen radio program. And now, for the first time, she brings her effervescent self to the screen—and with Fred Allen. Mrs. Nussbaum plays herself in the same ebullient personality as she is on the air and again is the perfect foil for Allen. Her real name is Minerva Pious, and she made a special trip from New York to Hollywood for her camera debut.

In one spectacular sequence, Ameche, Moore, Vallee and Allen are spotlighted as a quartet of singing waiters in a nightclub.

All in all, *It's In the Bag* has captured something new and unprecedented in movie comedies.

Sourced from pressbook material and published in the Havre (MT) Daily News June 8, 1945.



If you ask me, Jack Benny and Bob Hope need never worry where their next comedy writers are coming from, as long as . . . [the Japanese] keep up their standards of humor.

The leading laugh-getter among them is General Yamashita, He's the one who said: "The enemy, retreating northward, has advanced south," but his latest bon mot is what my husband, George, an employed radio personality, calls a belly-laugh.

Now the general says: "I have pursued Douglas MacArthur all over the South Seas. Now I have him in my iron trap."

George says the enemy propaganda boys remind him of the prize fighter manager, whose man taking a big beating. Said the manager between rounds: "You're doing fine. Think how his hands must hurt."

ST. JOSEPH (MO) GAZETTE • FEBRUARY 17, 1945



## BEFORE COMPUTERS THERE WAS RADIO!

And the best place to learn all about the golden age of radio is Radiogram. Don't miss a single issue of Radiogram. Check the back of your Radiogram for your membership number and renewal date. You can also give this to your friends who don't use a computer so they can join. New Members can just write the word NEW in the Member Number area. You can always renew your basic membership at [www.sperdvac.com](http://www.sperdvac.com) using PayPal, but you don't need a computer to be a member of SPERDVAC. Use this form and mail a check to SPERDVAC for \$20.00 to: SPERDVAC, 2625 Middlefield Road #171, Palo Alto, CA 94306.

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