

When Magic Was In The Air

A Remembrance on the 75th Anniversary of Radio

BY BILL ELWELL

There was a sense of excitement in Pittsburgh on that Tuesday evening in November. The year was 1920, and KDKA, the first commercially-licensed radio station, was broadcasting an event of great popular interest: the Harding-Cox presidential election returns.

The excitement generated by that landmark transmission was felt beyond Pittsburgh and produced remarkable reactions wherever it was received. Listeners elsewhere in Pennsylvania and in nearby Ohio and West Virginia were also fascinated by the voices and musical interludes their primitive receivers pulled from the air on the night of November 2. And, in a day when news rarely came sooner than the

next newspaper, people were astonished by the speed with which radio brought them the election returns. To many listeners, radio was like magic in the air

The contents of the historic broadcast from Pittsburgh, which was considered the beginning of modern radio, contrasted with much of the programming on the air in 1920. The transmission from KDKA was scheduled, significant, and memorable; while many others of that time were irregular, ordinary, and soon forgotten.

In 1921, KDKA continued to be in the forefront of the fledgling radio industry. It searched for and found new sources of

programming and thereby accomplished a number of "firsts" in the business: a "remote" church broadcast, a broadcast by a national figure (Herbert Hoover), and regular broadcasts of baseball scores and market reports.

During the same year, the Westinghouse Electric and Manufacturing Company, which had established KDKA, set up three additional stations in cities where it had plants: KBZ (East Springfield, Massachusetts), KYW (Chicago, Illinois), and WJZ (Newark, New Jersey). While these stations were being formed, Westinghouse produced its first popularly-priced radio receiver, which retailed for approximately \$60.

It is interesting to note that, in the early days of broadcasting, virtually no advertising, as we now understand the word, went out over the air. This frequently caused financial hardships for stations that did not have adequate backing from other sources.

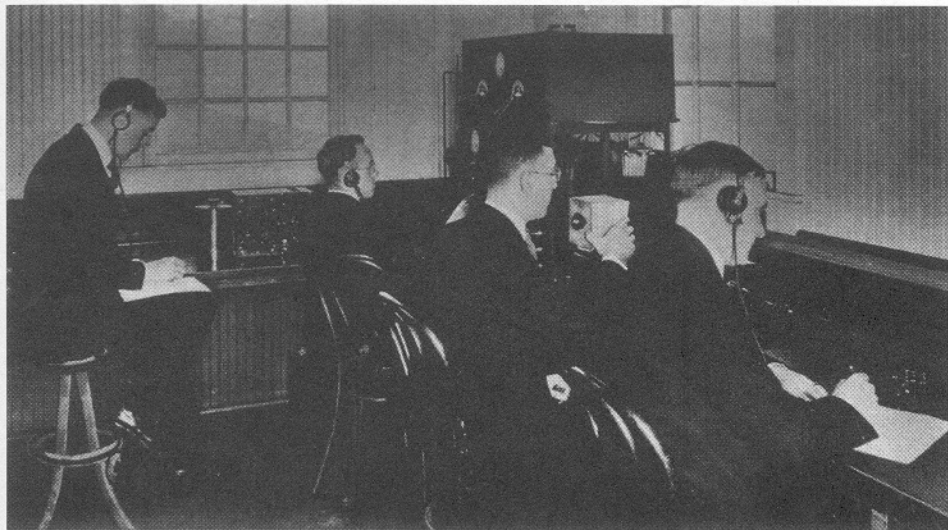
There were, however, some stations that did broadcast advertisements. These were often owned by a radio manufacturing establishment that used the stations to stimulate sales of its products.

A station that included sports events in its programming and advertised radios sometimes found the combination very worthwhile. Then, as now, many people enjoyed athletic contests immensely and, in that day, bought radios just to listen to them and, of course, to the station that broadcast them.

This situation was particularly evident



Bill Elwell is a regular contributor who fills his retirement years by gardening, hiking, writing and listening to old time radio shows.



KDKA, PITTSBURGH, makes radio history on November 2, 1920, with broadcast coverage of the Harding-Cox presidential election returns.

whenever a special athletic event was in the offing. Anticipation of the Dempsey-Carpentier boxing match, for example, prompted fans to buy thousands of radios just before the fight was broadcast from Jersey City on July 2, 1921. Although radio manufacturers and retailers were often hard-pressed to meet this kind of demand, they were pleased, of course, with the jump in sales.

The growing number of relatively substantial stations in 1921 began to attract entertainers who wanted to try out the new medium. Among them were Billy Jones and Ernie Hare, who became known as the "Happiness Boys." In October of that year, Jones and Hare began a program of song and humor over station WJZ and went on to become two of radio's first big stars.

By the fall of 1921, radio was beginning to show more signs of what it would become in the future. For example, a week-day program schedule dated October 9 offered listeners play-by-play coverage of the World Series, postgame comment and analysis, children's programs, a summary of the day's most important news, and a

concert of musical and vocal selections.

Radio continued to cover events of national interest in the early twenties and in the process often achieved new firsts. On November 11, 1921, for instance, President Harding's Armistice Day address was broadcast from the nation's capital and sent to Madison Square Garden in New York and the Civic Auditorium in San Francisco over telephone circuits. This arrangement foreshadowed future radio networks.

During the following year, the American Telephone and Telegraph Company added to the growing number of stations when it established WEAJ in New York. Many technical innovations were installed at that station, and new techniques of broadcasting and commercial sponsoring were developed there.

Then, on August 28, 1922, one of the first sponsored programs ever broadcast was aired from WEAJ. The commercial covered the advantages of certain apartments in Jackson Heights, New York, and was paid for by a suburban real estate firm.

There was another significant radio first in 1922, the broadcast of a stage show

75
YEARS
OF
RADIO
1920-1995

called *The Perfect Fool*, which featured comedian Ed Wynn. When the performance was aired over WJZ on February 19, Wynn was so nervous in front of the microphone that the pitch of his voice rose significantly. This

concerned him at first, but, when he realized that listeners liked his frantic, high-pitched tones, he decided to keep them in his act.

"Mike fright" was common in the early days of radio, and performers found various ways to cope with it. Veteran stage performer Alice Brady, for example, conquered her fear by covering the microphone with a lampshade, so she would not be aware of it during broadcasts.

In the early twenties, the radio equipment also posed technical problems for performers. The vacuum tubes used in transmitters at that time, for instance, were so fragile that the high notes of singers often caused them to blow out. It is said that Vaughn de Leath, perhaps the first woman to sing over radio, solved that problem by singing softly into the microphone and thereby inventing a style that became known as "crooning."

By May 1922, there were over 300 licensed radio stations. This represented more than a tenfold increase in less than two years.

The rapid growth of the industry had been largely unchecked and often caused conflicts when different stations broadcast on the same frequency at the same time. As a result, President Harding instructed the Secretary of Commerce to call a conference of radio manufacturers and broadcasters. The meeting established a federal legal authority over transmitting stations.

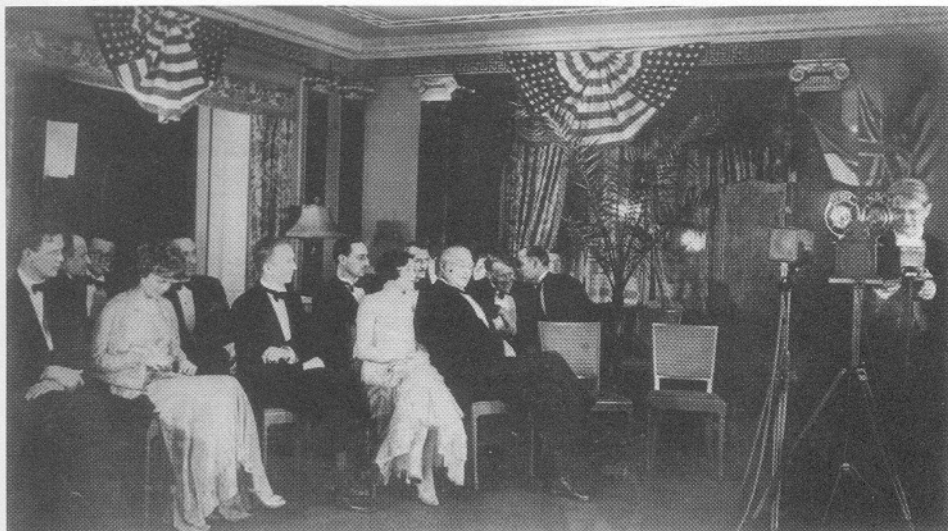
The conference appeared, however, to

have no negative effects on industry expansion, for by 1923 there were nearly 600 broadcasting licenses in existence. Nor did the conference seem to inhibit programming innovation, for, on December 4 of that year, WEAF broadcast the first fully sponsored program, *The Eveready Hour*. This program was also the first big variety show on radio. It featured a concert orchestra, a jazz band, and a one-act play. Then, only two days later, another industry first was realized when WEAF in New York, WCAP in Washington, D.C., and WJAR in Providence, Rhode Island, were connected by wire and became the nation's first network.

By the mid-1920s, radio, as a whole, had learned the value of commercial advertising and was beginning to prosper. The availability of new funds enabled the industry to increase the number of programs for children and programs of music, news, and sports events. During this expansion the popular, long-running *National Barn Dance* and *Grand Ole Opry* premiered from Chicago and Nashville, respectively.



BILLY JONES AND ERNIE HARE
"THE HAPPINESS BOYS"



NBC's INAUGURAL BROADCAST took place November 15, 1926 in the Grand Ballroom of the original Waldorf-Astoria Hotel which is the present site of the Empire State Building. One thousand guests turned out for the broadcast, including (far left) Charles A. Lindbergh and Amelia Earhart. The program was carried by 25 stations in 21 cities. An estimated two million listeners tuned in to hear such talent as Will Rogers and the vaudeville team of Weber and Fields.

The improved financial picture also enabled stations to add new kinds of programs to their schedules. WEAf, for instance, added talks by authorities on gardening, health, civic matters and topics of interest to women. Specific programs that began during that time included a unique showcase for young talent over WJZ called *The Children's Hour*, which later became known as *Coast-to-Coast on a Bus*. This show featured many child actors who later became radio stars as adults. Two well-known individuals from this group were Florence Halop, who became "Miss Duffy" in *Duffy's Tavern*, and Walter Tetley, who became "Leroy" in *The Great Gildersleeve*.

Other programming innovations in the mid-twenties included a comedy, *Sam 'n' Henry*, and a situation comedy, *The Smith Family*. The former premiered on WGN in Chicago and featured Freeman Gosden and Charles Correll, who would move to WMAQ in 1928 to star in the medium's

first great radio show, *Amos 'n' Andy*. *The Smith Family*, a prototype "soap opera," was heard over WENR in Chicago and featured the vaudeville team of Jim and Marian Jordan. The Jordans subsequently starred in *Smackout* and in the popular, long-running *Fibber McGee and Molly*.

Another major advance in the radio industry took place on November 15, 1926. On that date, the National Broadcasting Company, America's first permanent nationwide network, was created.

The formation of NBC began with the purchase of WEAf by the Radio Corporation of America. WEAf was designated the key station and linked with a group of affiliates. The entire network incorporated more than 3,500 miles of special telephone wires.

In January 1927, the Rose Bowl game was broadcast from California to the rest of the nation over NBC's new network. Later that year, NBC reorganized into two semi-independent networks. One of them



consisted of WJZ plus the old radio group network, and the other of WEAJ plus the old telephone group network.

Prospective cities were identified for each of the two new networks, and engineers

preparing maps of the arrangements connected one set of cities with blue lines and the other with red. Thereafter, WJZ and its stations became known as the blue network, and WEAJ and its stations became the red.

There were several special broadcasts on radio during 1927. One of them originated in Washington, D.C. and aired the arrival of aviator Charles Lindbergh at the nation's capital subsequent to his record-setting flight from New York to Paris. Two other specials that year came from Chicago: the first sponsored opera broadcast which originated in the Civic Auditorium and the broadcast of the Dempsey-Tunney prize fight which originated in Soldier Field.

The closing years of the decade saw the foundation of one more radio network, the Columbia Broadcasting System. It was formed by a merger of the nearly bankrupt Columbia Phonograph Broadcasting Company network and the United Independent Broadcasters, which supplied talent for independent stations. CBS subsequently sold the record company and went on the air with WABC (now WCBS) as the key station.

In 1928, radio continued to explore new areas of programming and produced innovations in the areas of drama, interviews, and farming. The results of these efforts were *Real Folks*, one of radio's first dramatic series; *Louella Parsons*, a program which provided fans with the latest news on the Hollywood scene; and the *National*

Farm and Home Hour with its well-known master of ceremonies, Everett Mitchell, who regularly affirmed that it was a beautiful day in Chicago.

In the final year of the 1920s, the number of new major programs increased substantially. The more than 20 new offerings represented about one-third of all major programs coming on the air during the entire decade.

Among the newcomers in 1929 were programs tailored for children and shows specializing in comedy, drama, education, interviews, music, mystery, news, religion, serial drama ("soap opera"), and variety. Some of the more memorable ones that year included two for the younger set: *The Adventures of Helen and Mary*, which was known later as *Let's Pretend*, and the *Buster Brown Gang*, which subsequently became *Smilin' Ed's Buster Brown Gang*.

Also premiering at the close of the 1920s was *Seth Parker*, an unusual blend of music and serial drama. It featured small-town New England humor and hymn singing, and, at one point, was broadcast from a schooner at sea.

The landmark serial comedy-drama, *The Rise of the Goldbergs*, first came over the airwaves in 1929, as did the *Rudy Vallee Show*. Vallee was often credited with making this program the first really professional variety show and used it to introduce many future stars including Phil Baker, Edgar Bergen, Eddie Cantor, Alice Faye, and Ezra Stone.

By the end of the 1920s, radio had captured the attention and affection of the nation. It had something for everyone, and people loved it. It had become their "magic box."

But there were storm clouds on the horizon in 1929, and, by year's end, the stock market had collapsed. It was the beginning of the Great Depression, and many wondered if radio would survive. There



EDDIE CANTOR

was a curious phenomenon at work in the economy during the 1930s. The same decade-long economic depression that destroyed many businesses also caused radio to flourish.

There were several factors involved in this apparent contradiction. For one, as the economy worsened, many Americans could no longer afford relatively expensive forms of entertainment, and, consequently, movie houses closed, nightclubs languished, and theatrical stock companies disappeared. This, in turn, led to unemployment for scores of vaudeville and movie celebrities, nightclub performers, and concert stars. Many of these talented individuals found work in radio and substantially improved the quality of programs.

When people realized that radio entertainment was getting better and virtually free, the number of listeners rose to new heights. And, when faced with a loss of income, families often gave up vacuum cleaners, furniture, and cars purchased on credit during the prosperous twenties but

kept up payments on their radios. They would not surrender their polished wooden boxes or the marvelous entertainment that came to them with just the turn of a knob and twist of a dial.

As advertisers became aware of the huge and growing radio audience, they moved increasingly into the medium and were responsible for an enormous financial boost to the industry. This injection of new capital, which further enhanced the already prospering business, enabled radio to expand even more throughout most of the Depression.

By 1930, the medium was about to present some of its brightest stars and most memorable programs. Radio and its audience were on the threshold of a "golden age."

The substantial upswing in new major programs first evident at the close of the twenties continued throughout most of the thirties. The number of new programs per year grew during those ten years from about 20 in 1929 to nearly three times that figure in 1939. And there were approximately 400 new offerings from 1930 through 1939, nearly seven times the total for the previous decade. Radio was "booming."

About 80 per cent of the growth in new programs during the 1930s occurred in seven categories: adventure, children, comedy, drama, music, serial drama ("soap opera") and variety. Two categories, drama and soap opera, accounted for nearly half of the gain.

There was memorable programming both within and outside of the major growth categories during the decade of the thirties. One example of the latter was an educational program, the *American School of the Air*, which premiered in 1930. This was a half-hour show that was broadcast weekday afternoons. It dramatized history, current events, and great literature and was

75
YEARS
OF
RADIO
1920-1995

required listening in many classrooms.

The early 1930s also witnessed the first significant adventure serial for youngsters, *Little Orphan Annie*. This newcomer helped give rise to "radio clubs" and

encouraged friends of "Annie" to write in for premiums: secret decoders and drinking mugs that were coincidentally suitable for quaffing the sponsor's chocolate-flavored drink.

In 1931, one of the first great stars of vaudeville to succeed in radio, Eddie Cantor, came on the air with the *Chase and Sanborn Hour*, a comedy-variety presentation that stayed among the top-rated shows. Other new arrivals in the medium that year included two popular offerings: a mystery, the *Eno Crime Club*, and a serial drama, *Myrt and Marge*, which was among the first major soap operas on radio.

The following year, two more graduates from vaudeville, Jack Benny and Fred Allen, made the transition to radio where they built long and successful careers in comedy. Another popular and long-running program, *One Man's Family*, also premiered in 1932. The same year saw the first airing of a new mystery, *The Shadow*, which brought an unusual element to the genre: an invisible hero. And there was a unique variety show, *Baby Rose Marie*, which also appeared that year. It starred Rose Marie Curly, a five-year-old child wonder who sang and acted. Years later on television, she played the part of "Sally," one of the comedy writers in the *Dick Van Dyke Show*.

During the early 1930s, there were some who tried to build and retain audiences by injecting extreme suspense and excessive



JACK BENNY AND FRED ALLEN

violence into scripts of certain kinds of programs. Parents, educators, sociologists, and government officials became especially concerned about programs such as murder mysteries which might inflict mental and emotional damage on youngsters.

This concern grew into a nationwide protest, and Congress itself was moved to act. It introduced bills that would restrict the programming that stations and networks could broadcast for children.

Networks responded to these pressures and tried to head-off restrictive legislation. They initiated their own codes for children's programs and banned horror, kidnapping, profanity, torture, vulgarity, and any use of the supernatural or superstition that was likely to cause fear in youngsters.

In 1933, the industry demonstrated its willingness to improve when it brought out two new programs for the younger set. One

of them was *Jack Armstrong, the All-American Boy*, which gave listeners lessons in law and order, clean living, fair play, and good behavior. Another was the *Lone Ranger*, which was action-packed, but did not emphasize violence. Both programs exemplified positive values and achieved great popularity.

The mid-thirties also witnessed the creation of yet one more network, the Mutual Broadcasting System. It consisted of four stations, WGN (Chicago), WLW (Cincinnati), WOR (New York), and WXYZ (Detroit), which came together in order to get a bigger share of the advertising dollar. Those years also saw the births of a new opportunity for aspiring performers and a special seasonal program. The former, *Major Bowes and His Original Amateur Hour*, quickly became one of the top-rated shows. The latter, *A Christmas Carol*, starred well-known actor Lionel Barrymore as "Scrooge" and became an annual presentation.

Other memorable premieres during that time included a comedy, *Fibber McGee and Molly*, and a drama, the *Lux Radio Theatre*. And one of the first major quiz programs, *Professor Quiz*, made its debut then.

As the midpoint of the decade passed, another aspect of the industry began to expand. World news was being made. There was a civil war in Spain, and German troops had entered the Rhineland. And radio increased the scope of its coverage in order to report these dramatic events to its listeners in America.

It was a different kind of conflict, however, that was broadcast to Americans on March 14, 1937. On that day, the famous Jack Benny - Fred Allen "feud" began.

The feud was, of course, only a clever publicity gag. Even so, it aroused great interest among listeners. And, when fans heard that Benny and Allen were going to engage in physical combat on one program,



MARIAN AND JIM JORDAN
(FIBBER MC GEE AND MOLLY)

the demand for tickets to the show was so great that the broadcast had to be moved to the more spacious ballroom in the Hotel Pierre in New York.

The same year also brought new entertainment for younger listeners. Among these programs were the memorable *Terry and the Pirates* and the marvelous Christmas story called the *Cinnamon Bear*.

The year 1937 was interesting for yet another reason. At least 17 major soap operas premiered that year, and that number came to represent the historic peak for the genre.

If there was a golden age for "soaps," it was the 1930s. More than 80 of them were first heard during that decade. And this figure represented more than half of all major soap operas ever broadcast.

Already on the air by 1937 were such well-remembered soaps as *David Harum*, *Ma Perkins*, *Pepper Young's Family*, and *The Romance of Helen Trent*. Newcomers that year included *Aunt Jenny*, *Guiding Light*, *Lorenzo Jones*, *Our Gal Sunday*,



Road of Life, and *Stella Dallas*. And there were many more to come.

Soap operas had an enormous following. Millions of housewives listened faithfully to the pathos and protracted plots

and took the anguished lives of their favorite characters to heart. Fans even wrote letters of advice and encouragement and sent gifts to them. Many listeners could easily relate to and sympathize with even a fictional person who had similar and sometimes worse problems than they did.

There was one other newcomer to the airwaves in 1937 well worth mentioning. It was the *Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy Show*. This unique comedy-variety, which featured the wit and wisecracks of ventriloquist Bergen's wooden alter-ego (McCarthy), went right to the top of the ratings.

One of this program's most memorable moments occurred on December 12 of its first year. During that broadcast, the seductive inflections used by guest Mae West in her "dialog" with Charlie McCarthy caused a listener protest which led to an investigation by the Federal Communications Commission.

In the late 1930s, radio was keeping its listeners well-informed of the growing tensions around the world. And, during that time, the airwaves also carried a new drama series, the *Mercury Theatre on the Air*.

On the evening of October 30, 1938, the *Mercury Theatre* presented an adaptation of H. G. Wells' *The War of the Worlds*. Unfortunately, many in the radio audience believed it was a news broadcast of a real invasion and became terrified. When the truth became known, the FCC and CBS, which carried the program, received hun-

dreds of complaints.

Although CBS apologized profusely, it also pointed out that the program had been described as only a play several times during the broadcast. Even so, broadcasters were strongly advised not to repeat that kind of program.

Radio continued to turn out other memorable programs through the end of the decade. For youngsters, there were new adventure serials including *Captain Midnight* and *Superman*. A popular drama, *Mr. District Attorney*, and the classic thriller, *I Love A Mystery*, also premiered at that time. And two noteworthy situation comedies, the *Aldrich Family* and *Blondie*, a spin-off from the comics, also joined the airwaves at the conclusion of the thirties.

The 1930s were a decade of growing and maturing for the radio industry. Those years saw the emergence of new kinds of programs, including adventure and detective, and substantial growth in existing categories, including children, comedy, drama, music, mystery, soap operas, and variety.

Throughout the decade, housewives often found solace in the fictional lives portrayed in daytime soaps. In the evening families tuned-in to comedy and variety shows and found welcome respite from the pressures and privations that came from a faltering economy. And radio prospered.

By the close of the thirties, the industry was entering its best years. Its widespread networks were carrying programs from coast-to-coast. And the number, quality, and variety of these shows provided regular, marvelous entertainment for millions of people.

To most listeners, these programs were radio's crowning achievement. And, to the industry, this achievement was a crown of gold.

If the thirties were a golden crown for the radio industry, then the forties were the



ARTHUR LAKE AND PENNY SINGLETON
"BLONDIE"

priceless jewels in the crown. It is estimated that at least 500 new major programs were added to the airwaves during those years. And this number reflected an increase of approximately 25 per cent over the preceding decade.

Comedy programs continued to fill top positions on the rating charts during the 1940s, and it was not unusual for Hollywood to sign up the stars of these shows for films. It was a special treat for radio fans whenever several of their favorite comedians appeared together in movies like *It's In the Bag* with Jack Benny and Fred Allen and *Look Who's Laughing* with Fibber McGee and Molly (Jim and Marian Jordan), Throckmorton P. Gildersleeve (Harold Peary), and Edgar Bergen and Charlie McCarthy.

Although radio comedies remained a favorite with listeners, most of the growth in new programming in the forties took place in seven other categories: adventure, audience participation, detective, drama, mystery, quiz, and situation comedy. Two of them, drama and situation comedy, ac-

counted for almost two-thirds of the gain.

Two popular quiz shows, the *Quiz Kids* and *Truth or Consequences*, premiered during the first year of the decade. Although quite different in content, they both enjoyed long runs.

The following year produced several other memorable programs. They included one of the first audience participation shows, *Breakfast at Sardi's*; comedy offerings, *Duffy's Tavern*, and the *Red Skelton Show*; detective and mystery programs, *Bulldog Drummond*, *Mr. and Mrs. North*, and *Inner Sanctum*; and situation comedies, *A Date With Judy* and the *Great Gildersleeve*.

In 1942, a new theme, the Second World War, began its nearly four year impact on programming. Not only did it become a major part of news reports, as would be expected, it also appeared in many kids' adventure serials, such as *Hop Harrigan*.

A war theme was also evident whenever well-known comedians like Eddie Cantor, Jack Benny, or Bob Hope broadcast their shows from military installations. The war was the background for many dramas, and it sometimes gave an air of reality to the story lines of "soaps." And the war was often evident in the songs sung on variety programs.

The Second World War not only found its way into existing categories of programming, it also was the topic around which new kinds of programs were built from the early to mid-forties. The influence of the conflict was sometimes seen in the titles of these shows which included *The Army Hour*, *Chaplain Jim*, *Ceiling Unlimited*, *The Doctor Fights*, *Stage Door Canteen*, and *Treasury Star Parade*.

The war years also witnessed the arrival of many new programs which had no direct connection with the conflict. And these shows did great service by distracting their audiences and giving them relief

75
YEARS
OF
RADIO
1920-1995

from wartime tensions. There were, for example, several audience participation programs which premiered during that time including *People Are Funny*, *Ladies Be Seated*, and *Queen For a Day*. The comedy

scene was brightened by the arrival of Jimmy Durante and Judy Canova. *Suspense* added its outstanding presence to the field of drama, and the *Whistler* brought its unique plots to the airwaves. *Life of Riley*, *Meet Corliss Archer*, and the *Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet* brought much needed laughter to listeners on the home front. Radio served the nation well during those troubled times.

At war's end in 1945, many businesses began the process of reconversion to peacetime pursuits. There was, however, no major change in the broadcasting industry. War themes faded, of course, but otherwise radio continued along the same path it had followed for more than a decade.

The industry produced more than 60 new major programs that year, the record for the business. And radio continued to be the "magic box" that brought welcome diversions from daily routines.

Radio did well at providing new diversions for its audience throughout the balance of the decade. Newcomers *Sky King* and *Straight Arrow* provided youngsters with excitement. *This Is Your Life* gave the curious a look at the famous. *Sam Spade*, *Richard Diamond*, *The Fat Man*, and *Dragnet* afforded challenge to those yearning to solve crimes. *Escape* offered a change for those wanting to get away from it all. *My Friend Irma*, *Life With Luigi*, *Our Miss Brooks*, and the *Phil Harris-Alice Faye Show* brought laughter to those in need of it. And the ever-popular Bing Crosby was

still around for those who were content to simply lean back and enjoy a mellow voice and soft music.

Radio still had something for everyone. But its best days were drawing to a close.

The second half of the forties witnessed a new phenomenon in the radio industry, a marked decrease in the number of new major programs going on the air each year. And by 1949, the number of newcomers was the lowest it had been in 15 years.

By 1950, radio was beginning to notice the loss of its audience to television. Nevertheless, the medium kept several of its best performers on the air and turned out more than 80 new major programs during the decade. However, more than one-third of the newcomers premiered in 1950. From then on they averaged little more than a handful annually.

There were essentially five categories of new programs during the 1950s: adventure, drama, science fiction, situation comedy, and western adventure. "Excitement" seemed to be a common element in many of these shows and appeared to be in them to keep the existing audience interested and to attract new listeners at the same time.

A classic science fiction offering in 1950, *Dimension X*, offered listeners a sense of wonder as well as excitement and produced many memorable programs. Then, in 1951, a new adventure show, *Silver Eagle*, *Mountie*, went on the air for the younger set.

There was a minor upsurge in new programs in 1952 which included two situation comedies, *I Love Lucy* and *My Little Margie*, and a western adventure, *Gunsmoke*. All three had very successful counterparts on television.

Although it was mostly downhill from then on, there were some worthwhile additions to the airwaves in the following years.

In 1953, for instance, movie celebrity



MARIE WILSON
"MY FRIEND IRMA"

Jimmy Stewart went on the air in *Six Shooter*, another western adventure. This was ironic in a way, for it was the opposite of what had happened in the early forties when Hollywood hired radio celebrities to star in films.

The mid-fifties saw the emergence of *X Minus One*, a successor to *Dimension X*, and NBC's *Monitor*, a weekend "service" made up of comedy skits, music, news, and talk.

As the decade drew to a close, a unique comedy, the *Stan Freberg Show*, came on the air. And it was followed by two more westerns, *Frontier Gentleman* and *Have Gun, Will Travel*.

During the fifties, the radio industry realized that its glamorous days were ending and that it needed to find a new audience and new programming. It could not expect Arthur Godfrey's popular morning shows or the remaining soap operas to last forever. Nor could radio expect its well-established evening programs like *Fibber McGee and Molly*, *Mr. District Attorney*,

and *Great Gildersleeve* to retain their audiences indefinitely.

During its search for a new audience, radio accepted the loss of its listeners to television. As always, they wanted entertainment, and the visual nature of the new medium provided more of that than radio could.

There were certain kinds of programming, however, in which radio found it could excel: music, news, and talk. And it could broadcast these kinds of programs to people who were not in front of their television sets. Thus, radio's new audience became people in offices and factories, people in cars, and people working around the house.

By the 1960s, the music-news-talk format was so successful that it became the pattern for the entire industry. And, except for some revivals of vintage radio programs, these three categories still represent much of what is on the air today.

Radio has traveled a long and interesting road during its 75 years. Its voice has grown from a muted whisper barely audible in the earphones of a simple crystal set to the rich, full sounds pouring from the speakers of a sophisticated sound system.

In its prime, radio created a thousand different programs, made stars of fascinating people, and broadcast matchless entertainment through the air. It was a cornucopia that, for many years, overflowed with adventure, drama, humor, music, and mystery.

Millions listened to radio in those days. All it took was the turn of a knob and twist of a dial. Then a polished wooden box came to life and pulled voices and music from the air. And those wondrous sounds often touched the heart and stirred the imagination.

To many listeners, radio was magic in the air. ■