

GATHER 'ROUND THE RADIO  
E-NEWSLETTER FOR THE METROPOLITAN  
WASHINGTON OLD-TIME RADIO CLUB  
THE GRTR STUDIO EDITION



THE THEATRICALITY ISSUE

JULY 24, 2018

THE SET-UP

Hello fine listeners, and welcome once again to the mythical confines of the GRTR Studio, where we broadcast information and inspiration about radio, music, nostalgia, personality, books, and beyond. Terry Gross continues to be

our inspiration. Listen to her “Fresh Air” radio show, live or podcast; check your NPR listings for a station where you can tune in.

Our little tinpot studio is up and running, because in the past weeks Chuck has done some tinkering with the sound booth, and Joanie and I have been placing furniture, dusting around, and getting the Mud Room together. We are in a new venue, you may have heard. There’s still a meadow and a creek out back; the thing is that in June we moved from one river to another, from the Susquehanna to the Delaware; suburban Philadelphia is the area and Langhorne is the town. I downsized to a garden apartment, and the outlook is promising: cycling the trails, tuning in to the theater scene, and visiting places to ask about volunteering.

Chuck is piping in Schumann’s Third Symphony, called “The Rhenish”, and it conveys “radiant ambiance,” (from the liner notes) as Schumann himself was moving to a new assignment in the Rhineland.

Joanie is tracking the sweep of the clock towards network feed. We three are enjoying Mr. Peet’s coffee and Mrs. Whitacre’s carrot cake, as we look over the dusty courier pouch. It’s chock-full, can’t leave anybody out. Joanie is tapping her pencil on her clipboard as we scurry down the hallway. Chuck fades on the Leonard Bernstein recording.

### ON THE AIR

Hello everyone, and welcome to the broadcast!

Three names will lead the way this afternoon. We have news from Karl Schadow, who was featured in a Library of Congress blog in May of this year. It’s a really nice interview, we’ll give you the link to the blog. Also, the good word has come in about Jim Cox, author and traveler, who is resting up and in good spirits as he regains his strength. A newcomer for us, Arnold Cohen has a radio talk show from a studio near the Rutgers campus in New Brunswick New

Jersey. He's wide-ranging, and I found him in a feature in the current issue of the Rutgers alumni magazine.

Edgar Russell wrote us a thoughtful message of his appreciation for our efforts with the GRTR. He's seen it evolve over the years, and I've enjoyed our collaboration. Thanks so much, Edgar.

And heavens, we can't forget our sponsor the tough-as-nails Dayton Dragons!

In addition: Happy Birthday, Tim!

It's almost time for the September MANC. The web-site is as colorful as ever:

[www.MidAtlanticNostalgiaConvention.com](http://www.MidAtlanticNostalgiaConvention.com)

Then I'll talk about the beloved long-running show, "First Nighter." about the anticipation we all feel about theater; and we've got tickets!

#### REST UP, JIM

Jim Cox would be comfortable in the stands at a baseball game or walking the sandy beaches of Gulf Coast Florida. He has spent time around eastern Tennessee and in the hills of western North Carolina; not to mention many an excursion on a coast-to-coast overnight train. Then he did all that writing! Now Jim is resting under a doctor's care, and he sends his heartfelt appreciation to the OTR community.

#### KARL SCHADOW IN THE NEWS

To start with, here is the link to Karl's interview "Inquiring Minds," with Wendi Maloney of the Library of Congress:

<https://blogs.loc.gov/loc/2018/05/inquiring-minds-bringing-radios-golden-age-back-to-life/>

However, before you click on it, let's talk for a few minutes about Karl's involvement with our Club, in particular his contribution of articles to *Radio*

*Recall* and his research in support of Club members and their efforts of publication.

My earliest archive of Karl is from the February 2011 issue of *Radio Recall*. It's the lead story, "Shedding Light on *Dark Fantasy*" an early show favorite of his. This is referenced in Maloney's blog, where Karl names "mystery and horror" as his favorite genres of shows. *Radio Recall* editor Jack French gives Karl a two-part entry in the April 2011 *RR*.

Karl is quite the research enthusiast, and he knows the hallways, the information desks, and reading rooms of the Library of Congress. He's happy when a show he's researching has both recordings and scripts. He follows the progress of the Library's preservation program. There was a huge convention on the subject (February 2016), detailed for us by Martin Grams, *Radio Recall* June 2016 p. 1 ff.

Next, we find a Schadow entry in *Radio Recall* October 2012, where he details the move of pop literature "from comics to radio." Title: "That's the Spirit," in which he admits to the show's ("The Spirit") obscurity, prompting Jack to give it expanded coverage in Part Two (p.4 this time) of *RR* Dec. 2012.

Graphics were always a staple of Jack French's tenure at *RR*. In Karl's next *RR* entry, the graphics are vintage and hold forth in small-scale impact. The October 2013 *RR* gave Karl the lead story with "Tailspin Tommy," detailing the show's adventures of Tommy and Skeeter, and the bi-planes they flew, often in fierce combat. The story is interesting, augmented by the graphics, line drawings from the '30s, such motion and detail!

#### MUSIC BRIDGE AND COMMERCIAL

Joanie cues us to music, and Chuck pipes in the lovely "Knoxville, Summer 2015," by Samuel Barber, to a text by James Agee. It's precise and evocative of families, neighborhoods, and young adults studying the arts. Here the soloist is soprano Anne-Catherine Gillet, with a chamber orchestra, in Liege, Belgium.

### OUR SPONSOR, THE DRAGONS

The Dayton Dragons, yes! Our team is playing hard but still under .500 win/losses. They travelled to Beloit Wisconsin, where they split a series with the Beloit Snappers. Now they return home for more stellar efforts in an extended home stand against the Fort Wayne Tin Caps and the Lansing Lugnuts. Great names, and good times in any minor league stadium. The competition is keen, and this a tough schedule for the fiery Dragons.

### RADIO FROM RUTGERS

I got my master's in library science from Rutgers, and I have long associations with the people and the towns in the by-turns beautiful and bureaucratic state of New Jersey. A fellow who has stayed the course in the midst of it all is Arnold Cohen, (otherwise "Shep"), a law professor at Rutgers-Newark, and a labor advocate for the recognition of workers' rights in the state. His radio show "The World of Work" goes much wider than dry commentary about one court case or another. He broadcasts, and he travels. He talks to any number of day-to-day working folk. He began on a whim at a small station and had a list of guests to last a few months' worth of weekly shows.

People loved it, and here he is. He tells the Rutgers magazine interviewer that he wants "always to come away having learned something." Thus, he has had guests from Las Vegas, New York, Boston, and he talked to a fellow from Texas, a railroad worker who had written a book with the inimitable title: *Train of Thought: 40 Years Workin' on the Railroad*. The Santa Fe, which has a colorful history in story, song, and real-life experience. Otherwise, Cohen has interviewed folks from the world of theater (George Chakiris, Carl Reiner) and broadcast politics (Jim Lehrer). This is a nice look into the breadth of the medium of radio; the auspicious side of talk radio may not transmit very far in miles, but it is important to those who listen and appreciate.

THEATRICALITY

I am stage-struck, loving all aspects of theater. Community theater taught me many things, foremost that I had trouble memorizing lines. Radio drama is good and in great demand, and it's done with script in hand. "First Nighter" is a celebration of anticipation; the intro usually takes a full two minutes, with superb SFX of big-city traffic while the narrator hails a cab and tells us about the play we're going to see.

John Dunning gives "The First Nighter Program" a good write-up, a page and a half (*On the Air* 252-254) It is well-placed, too; people will find it exactly after they read Dunning's 8-plus page history of "Fibber McGee and Molly." He gives good details about the networks and "First Nighter's" different time-slots over the years, from the mid-1930s until 1953. The early sponsor was Campana lotion, later, Miller High Life The stories are great, but only one or two are backstage glimpses about the world of theater itself. The theater life is in the introduction: amidst the traffic noise and sidewalk chatter, we might hear, "There's Van Johnson!" or "Is that Betty Grable?" The usher announces "tickets," and reminds the audience of "curtain" between acts.

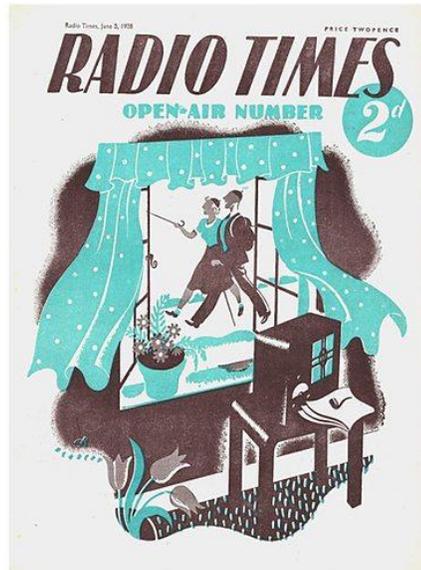
. Dunning describes the show as “upbeat and nonviolent,” and that freelance writers wrote original scripts. It’s not, however, all hearts and flowers. The stories from the post-war years are hard-bitten and full of regret and thwarted ambition. One story (“Help Wanted Female” 1/8/48) is about a con man (William Conrad) who hires a woman to manage a direct-mailing campaign to raise money for children in Europe. She tips off the police and the man’s shell distribution companies fall apart. It’s a grim take on post-war relief efforts.

Another strong woman character wants to break into publishing; but runs into “...well aren’t you pretty...” at every interview. She takes a man’s name and writes Western stories, and they become a hit. She tells the papers, “...well I was just writing the stories my grandpa told me...” The old man is thrilled and says that he is happy now that we have “A Writer in the Family.” 1/29/48.

The story with a true backstage flavor is “Old Lady Shakespeare” (6/17/48). It involves an actress whose career had faded with her years. She plans a comeback, finances it herself, and knows just the right part in “Romeo and Juliet.” It brings to mind this catch-phrase from the theater, to wit: “...don’t hang around here ‘til you have to play The Nurse...”

An early script, from October 1939, is gentle, poignant, and complex. The owner of an Italian restaurant narrates; a young couple are his listeners. It’s called “Symphony With Your Spaghetti” and the subject is an elderly lady who comes in every night to listen to the symphony hour on radio. The woman had been a violin prodigy and had dreams of playing in a symphony orchestra. Her tutor, all those years ago, had evil intentions and kept her on a schedule of solo appearances, lucrative for himself only. The lady ran away from her manager’s influence and indeed from music altogether. Her chance of playing in an orchestra was gone, but she derived great pleasure from a quiet supper in a side street café, listening to her favorite style of music.

These are strong stories, indeed. “First Nighter” presented thoughtful and topical ideas for people living and making their way during the war years, and evidently the doubtful years beyond, as well.



### MUSIC CUE AND NETWORK FEED

That’s all from the dusty courier pouch; thanks for listening and keep those cards and letters coming! Here’s information about another NPR program:

From the Top” is another program which features young artists and their burgeoning careers. <http://fromthetop.org> Famous now for years on NPR, the program is hosted by Christopher O’Riley, and perhaps rivals the “Prairie Home” folks for their prodigious number of road shows. They visit; they audition, and they choose their folks. And O’Riley guides the youngsters through their playing and their interview time, always with aplomb and a good dash of humor. The show’s list of stations is sporadic in coverage; check the list, and listen in.

Soup and sandwiches in the Mud Room? But of course!

Mark Anderson

Langhorne PA