

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



THE ARID ISSUE

JULY 3, 2021

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.

The weather is in the headlines: heatwave in the northwest USA; wildfires in British Columbia; the southeast is being drenched yet again. And even the Catoctin Range got a respite from the heat when thunderstorms and cloudy days swept through a few days ago. I went to my quiet place and took out a photo of a family visit to the Desert Botanic Gardens outside Phoenix. Dale Chihuly puts a feeling of beauty and endurance in an arid landscape.

Our Studio crew is getting ready; Bert and Beverly are watching the sweep of the clock towards network feed. Fred has coaxed the squawks and hums out of the old sound board, and he's piping in the lovely Samuel Barber vocal piece, "Knoxville, Summer of 1915": We've broadcast it before here from the Studio; it features an orchestra in Liège, James Agee's contemplative words of family life, and the luminous voice of Anne-Catherine Gillet. Fade to network feed.

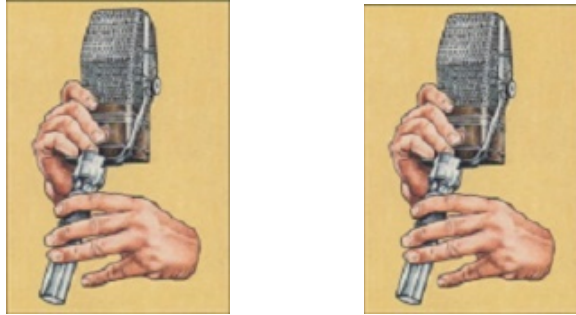
### ON THE AIR

Hello, everyone, and welcome to the broadcast! We're sifting through the dusty old Courier Pouch, finding a letter from Edgar and a flyer from MANC. We'll be talking with Jack French on the phone shortly; and giving a shout-out to a family business in Kansas, known to us as John of OTRCat.com. And from the archives, we'll look at an article about a trailblazing woman.

### JACK FRENCH AND HIS SAN FRANCISCO PRESENTATIONS

You remember the recent Club meeting on ZOOM, when Jack French presented us with his research on radio programs out of San Francisco? He and I talked a bit more about that, by computer, last week. Our GRTR Studio soundman Fred made a transcription, and he's going to play it now.

Cue it up, Fred, and thanks so much!



GRTR

Hello, Jack! This FaceTime Chat app is pretty neat! It's how you made your presentation to that Historical Association on the West Coast, am I right?

JACK

That's right; and now I'm getting more experience using the app to talk to you. Reminds me of the time years and years ago when Mark Bush showed me how to get the most use out of my cell phone!

GRTR

That's so cool! Will wonders never cease! So when you talked to the San Francisco Historical Association, why did you concentrate your lecture on just the 1940s?

JACK

I guess it was just self-preservation. In my speech to the Association I was limited to only 45 minutes, with another 15 set aside for Q & A. I figured about all I could cover in that time would be one decade of radio.

GRTR

And you were right to do so. But, still, that eliminated one of the Bay City's first and most successful series, *Cecil and Sally*.

JACK

Yup, that syndicated show began in 1928 and had attained nearly a million listeners by the early Thirties. So I couldn't take the time. But now I've got my own format and the shows and the people, so that's the decade that I want to share with your listeners.

GRTR

Frank Morgan told me that two KYA employees, name of John Patrick, an announcer, and Helen Troy, the organist, started bantering in the mail room. She would talk in a baby voice with a lisp, and he would speak in a Yiddish dialect.

JACK

Their fun chats became humorous skits that eventually were aired under that title, *Cecil and Sally*. Today there are available about 250 episodes, most about 8 minutes long. Frank recently acquired some audio copies and will play a couple for a future "First Fifteen" at a Club meeting.

GRTR

Continuing to speak of the Thirties, didn't *Cheerio* also get his start in San Francisco? I've learned only recently that he was radio's happy philosopher who read poetry.

JACK

Correct. I had forgotten about old *Cheerio when* Edgar Russell brought him to my attention. It was Charles K. Field who was radio's optimistic messenger of happy tidings. Field would start every program with, "Hello, this is *Cheerio*." But he never used his real name on the air.

GRTR

You bet. He gave his 1936 autobiography a title with just one word: *Cheerio*. While he started on radio about 1924 in San Francisco, he only reached great popularity after he moved to New York in 1927.

JACK

And, sad to say, we've not discovered a single existing audio copy from the hundreds of programs *Cheerio* aired.

GRTR

That's almost true of the kids' show *Jolly Bill and Jane* from network radio in New York. They were on the air for decades out of New York, and yet only two copies of that kids' show are available to today's listeners.

JACK

And those two copies are unique since they were both broadcast from San Francisco, in the 1940's yet! That little fact was good enough for me to squeeze them into my recent talk.

GRTR

It was William Steinke who played Jolly Bill. He first aired his show around 1928 over NBC from Manhattan. His sponsor was Cream O' Wheat if memory serves. And, who played Jane?

JACK

At least two different little girls voiced Jane. The first was Muriel Harbater, and she was followed by Peggy Zinke. Both were pre-teens when they started at the mike.

GRTR

Then, you mentioned, in the late '40s Steinke resurfaced *Jolly Bill and Jane* out in San Francisco, with Patty Prichard, a 20-year-old actress and singer, portraying "little Jane."

JACK

Right, so from that post-WWII period we get the only two surviving audio copies of *Jolly Bill and Jane*. The copies are for sale from OTR dealer Jerry Haendiges, on his website <http://www.otrsite.com>

GRTR

Good to hear, Jack. By now, I'm sure Beverly is tapping her pencil on her clipboard and looking for commercial break. So we're turning it over; thanks for the good talk.

JACK

Nice chatting with you; goodbye now.

MUSIC BRIDGE AND COMMERCIAL

Fred is piping in the sunbaked Mediterranean sound of Nino Rota and his soundtrack to "Godfather Part Two." And fade, as we move to our sponsor the Dayton Dragons, who are at the top of the heap in High-A Level baseball. Their brilliant pitching has vaulted them to 7 games over .500; the youngsters have "live arms" as the saying goes. Few runs are scored against them; the ball is always in play and that keeps the defense on their toes. Development at its best! They're in Lansing this weekend to play the Lugnuts.

OLD-TIME RADIO SHOWS AND THE FAMILY BUSINESS

We may mention here the idea in OTR of research, collecting, and sales.

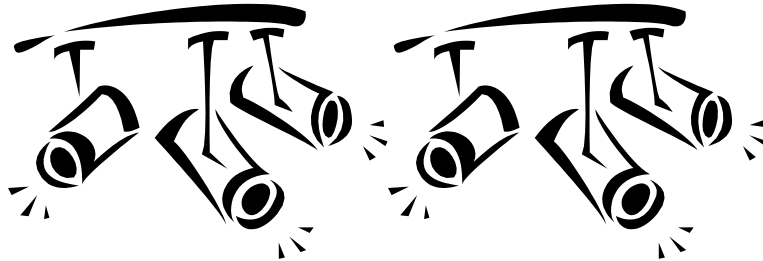
Jack mentioned Jerry Haendiges and his website for purchase of shows.

Another fellow named Jon has an OTR business operating out of Lenexa Kansas. <https://www.otrcat.com> I have bought Mp3s there, good service.

The vendors are numerous as we have heard in the Studio archives over the years.

The OTR Researchers Group on Facebook is another source for “conversation starters” and catalogs of shows available.

Good idea, I think, to keep the small businesses afloat if you are a collector.



### EDGAR RUSSELL, THE CLUB, AND MANC

Edgar has generously taken charge of the Club’s Saturday 8/21 Noon Time Slot at the MANC Convention. He will direct the premier performance of his new radio play, “Miranda’s Miracle.” A Club flash email was sent some time back announcing auditions for readers to fill the various parts in the play. At this writing we imagine that roles have been cast and rehearsals are in the works. For information about players needed and rehearsal schedules, you may contact Edgar at: [edgar\\_russell@hotmail.com](mailto:edgar_russell@hotmail.com)

Martin Grams Jr. has assembled a stellar lineup of celebrities to attend the Convention, at the **Hunt Valley Delta Marriot, Hunt Valley, Maryland.**

<https://www.midatlanticnostalgiaconvention.com/> Aug.19–21.

The website will give particulars about Vendors, Seminars, and On-Stage Interviews with celebrities.

### OTHER CLUB NEWS

At the June ZOOM meeting, other Club items were presented for decision by Parliamentarian Bert Rude. Chief among them was our declaring that Wendy Wilmer should serve as Club President. Wendy accepted and told us of the

pleasure she has felt working with the Club in radio script presentations, and that her past experience with non-profit groups will be useful towards offering guidance to the Club in future projects. She's new to radio, she tells us, and we're sure she's here to stay. She's part of a tradition.

### WOMEN IN RADIO

Here is an excellent, well-researched article by Jack French, the basis for a presentation he gave at the MANC a few years ago. It featured a lady who went by the name of "Ora." Beverly will read Jack's astute and surprising article, from the GRTR September 8, 2016.

In 1934, she was considered "the most influential woman in radio". Guess who? She was born Aurore Dolores Daigle in Massachusetts but since few could pronounce her first name, she took the nickname "Ora." She eventually married a widower with three children and acquired the married name "Nichols." So, who was Ora Nichols, why was she so influential in radio, and why in the heck does virtually nobody in our OTR hobby today know who she was?

Ora started her working career as a bookkeeper who also played the piano. When she married Arthur Nichols in 1920, the two tried to make a living in vaudeville with her at the piano and him playing violin. They had modest success until the silent movies crushed vaudeville. They next took employment playing music for the silent movies. This job was expanded to also doing the sound effects for the films, including hoof beats, crashes, weather changes, animal sounds, etc. They created some of their own devices for producing these sounds and were doing very well until "The Jazz Singer" debuted in 1927. With the birth of movies "that talked", the folks who provide the music and sounds for the silent films were soon looking for other employment.

By 1928 Ora and Arthur had found some free-lance work for CBS and NBC doing sound effects for radio. Within a few years, they were put on staff payroll at CBS and were doing sound effects for



their network shows. Thus, Ora became the first, and only, head of sound effects for a radio network. She trained their assistants at the sound table, usually employing drummers who were familiar with percussion instruments. When Arthur died a few years later, Ora continued to do sound effects, create new instruments of sound, and was personally responsible for creating the extensive sound effects studio at CBS.

She was on the team that provided sound effects for “War of the Worlds” under Orson Welles, an erratic and demanding director. She led the sound effects on “Buck Rogers of the 25th Century” and invented the sound of his spaceship. With a few co-workers helping, she did the sound effects on “March of Time” from 1931 to 1945. Ora retired from radio in 1945, probably convinced that she had proven that women could, and should, be hired as sound effects personnel in radio broadcasting. Of course, in the Golden Age of Radio, women were almost never considered for announcers, station managers, engineers, sound effects personnel, etc. so her hopes never materialized. She died in 1951 at the age of 58 after a long illness.

#### MUSIC BRIDGE AND NETWORK FEED

Thanks so much, Beverly, nicely done; an important if bittersweet portrait.

The clock sweeps towards network feed. Thanks to everyone for helping out.

Neil Hannon is an extraordinary British songwriter. He pays tribute to the Beach Boys sound with his summertime song, “The Pop Singer’s Fear of the Pollen Count.” He loves being outside, hay fever’s here for the ride, first your head explodes then you need to blow your nose. You feel that his band might just break into, “Help Me, Rhonda.”

Keep those cards and letters coming! Thanks ever! Mark Anderson.