

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



THE PIONEER SPIRIT ISSUE

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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 back roads through the Poconos are a joy for driving and being careful about it. Soaring hills crowded with trees and sudden deep chasms make one

grateful for road engineering. Escarpments in the distance are enhanced by clouds and blue sky beyond.

And so after such a drive, I'm back in our tinpot studio, ready to greet Fred, Beverly and Bert who have carpooled their way north past Harrisburg, over the Sullivan Trail summit at 1,900-foot elevation, and down to our piney path.

The dusty courier pouch was empty and forlorn on the front porch, so Bert dropped it on the table in the Mud Room and said, "Well, Pop, there you go!" Fred got busy piping in a nice folk song by an earnest fellow who calls Long Island his home and whose refrain declares, "...and that's that!"

I'm getting the coffee on, to go with the pastries that the team has brought in from the Poor Cousins Bakery where they stopped in Hazleton. Beverly is watching the sweep of the clock towards network feed.

ON THE AIR

Hello everyone! And welcome to the broadcast! Glad you're staying with us.

I remain on the outskirts of the Club; and here we shall dip into the GRTR Archives for an excellent essay that Fred Berney wrote for *Radio Rides the Range*, an anthology from 2014.

Our century could use the approach of Fred's subject, one Britt Ponset, who was a ranch hand and peacemaker among the settlements of the early American West, a man who would rather talk a situation through than resort to gun play. The show had the awkward title "The Six Shooter," given the insight and rhythm that James Stewart's voice gives the role.

A GENTLEMAN IN THE WEST

And to the canyon country of the American West we go!

James Stewart's role was heralded as a triumph of a wise reading for Stewart, from a sensitive script by Frank Burt.

In the September 2018 GRTR (Scripts in the Dust) I featured the "Six Shooter" with an emphasis on Frank Burt, the scriptwriter.

Frank Burt was adept at taking the great swath of land that is the American west and carving out deep character studies that fit the time and place. Stewart was accompanied by established radio actors: William Conrad, Harry Bartel, Virginia Gregg, and Parley Baer, among others. Frank Burt was up to the task of writing true ensemble roles.

In each “Six Shooter” episode, Britt Ponset, the tall, laconic cowboy, narrates his travels through the landscape from town to ranch. In the episode “A Friend in Need,” Ponset muses on the canyon up ahead: 50 yards wide and several miles long, like two slabs of granite just rising up; he had slept there among the mesquite, and overnight his gear is wet and heavy while he’s waiting for the sun to cross the canyon walls one side to the other.

In “Quiet City” he muses about the changes over the years: not much frontier anymore, new houses on stretches of desert past the edge of town; ranch land now given over to farming. Maybe not much call for signing on as a roundup hand anymore. And he finds a boy who wants to go back east to study law. Britt says in an offhand way that he would have liked a little more education, himself, hoping to convince the father to let the boy go. It’s Frank Burt writing for Stewart’s style, right down the line.

The motif for Britt Ponset is that he wants to avoid domesticity, and yet folks in one town or another want him to marry and settle down. He’s befuddled as he talks his way out of it. “Aunt Emma” is an amusing story in which Ponset’s aunt comes from back East to settle in the town, and she wants Britt to move in. A listener can just see him, twisting his hat in his hand, “Well, you see...”. He relents and lives a settled life with his aunt, for a while. When he finds a way to leave, Aunt Emma says to him that she has seen his room with his bedroll on the floor, where he prefers to sleep. Britt sheepishly says, “I suppose,” as only James Stewart can.

Fred Berney authored an excellent essay on this series, in [Radio Rides the Range](#), edited by Jack French and David Siegel, McFarland, 2014, p.167-169.

Fred is expansive on the history of the show in its broadcast years of the early 1950s. He details its debut on *Hollywood Star Playhouse*, that it was picked up by NBC, and that script alterations downplayed the original killing potential of Ponset and his pistol. Fred writes: “Obviously this was done to make the main character appear more respectable and

responsible...Ponset was not a lawman, just a roving cowpoke, yet he got involved in righting wrongs, catching evildoers, and helping those in trouble.”

Further, Fred writes that James Stewart signed on “...because he believed that the program portrayed honest stories of the West and the character of Britt Ponset typified the greatness that built America.”

Fred also points out the rare instance of a radio show having a movie star as a main character; and, re: Stewart: “Obviously what he earned on the movie set significantly dwarfed the modest salary he had to accept on *The Six Shooter*, a sustained radio series.

Another insight from Fred: “Trouble tended to come to him, rather than Ponset looking for it...Also he was not necessarily the hero who always bests the bad guy; in at least two episodes Britt was held at gunpoint until someone else saved the day.”

Fred writes of the technical aspects of the “Six Shooter” studio:

The sound effects on this series were excellent, both the manual ones and those from transcription disks. Musical bridges were well executed and maintained the tone of the various events within the program. The series main theme, the work of musician Basil Adlam, was “Highland Lament,” a haunting melody of the plains. Radio audiences found the melody so compelling that at the end of one program the announcer stated that the station had received letters from listeners wanting to know more about the theme music played at the opening and closing of the program.

Fred gives a nice account of Britt almost getting married in “Myra Barker,” the final episode of the show. Fred writes:

“...they both realize that married life at this time is not possible as long as he still has wrongs to right and people to save. So, in the end, just as other proverbial cowboys had done, Britt Ponset rode off into the sunset.” p. 169.

MUSIC BRIDGE AND COMMERCIAL

Beverly taps her clipboard and cues the music. Fred smiles as the melody soars; an art song by Franz Schubert: “Shepherd on the Rock,” which depicts an Alpine setting with piano, vocal, and a lovely and plaintive clarinet

accompaniment. My recording is from the live BBC broadcast at the Leeds Festival. Beautiful with plentiful applause, to fade.

Our sponsor, the Dayton Dragons, are doing pretty well in the High A Developmental League. They are some 7 games above .500; it's those long-haul double-headers that can lead to exhausting losses.

Bright spot? Yes indeed!

You may recall that a few years ago I mentioned the phenomenal young Dragons player named Jeter Downs. He stood out as a fielder and hitter; and he made the leap from the Dragons to being picked by the Los Angeles Dodgers for their minor league system. Another trade went through, and this year he surfaced on the Worcester Red Sox team for the parent club Boston Red Sox. Jeter's recent play for the WooSox turned heads in Boston's front office.

And you know what else? Over the weekend he got a call from the parent club, saying, "...get here to Fenway by 5 this afternoon!"

Jeter made the trip, got up to bat and tied the game for the Red Sox with an RBI-double, and then ran hard to score the winning run.

He was interviewed on national TV, and received a Text from former Yankee star Derek Jeter, congratulating him on his major league success.

He surely had good coaching while playing for the Dragons.



CLASSICAL MUSIC WITH STORIES

Rummaging in my satchel of cassettes, I came across “Vivaldi’s Ring of Mystery: A Tale of Venice and Violins.” I listened, and it was as wonderful as ever. It is one of a set of four composer stories from an outfit in Canada: Classical Kids Music Education: Toronto, 1991, Susan Hammond, producer.

I remember the other three, but alas, I have them no longer:

- Beethoven Lives Upstairs
- Tchaikovsky Discovers America
- Mr. Bach Comes to Call

The company has expanded their offerings to the wider world of childhood education: films, teacher’s guides, stage productions, and the like. The presentations are astute and done nicely with a full-cast and excerpts of each composer’s music.



I plucked this photo from the website, for our Club’s educational purposes:

[Beethoven Lives Upstairs –](#)

[Educational Resources – Classical Kids Music Education](#)

<https://www.classicalkidsnfp.org> › productions › educational-resources

MUSIC CUE TO NETWORK FEED

Beverly is watching the sweep of the clock towards network feed. Fred is piping in a haunting folk song sung by Loreena McKennitt, “Night Ride across the Caucasus.”

There’s a driving beat of drums and a distant mandolin. A long-sliding cello and full-voice chorus urge us onward:

Ride on Through the night Ride on
Ride on Through the night Ride on
There are visions, there are memories
There are echoes of thundering hooves
There are fires, there is laughter
There's the sound of a thousand doves.



We're so glad you tuned in! Keep those cards and letters coming!

Soup and sandwiches in the Mud Room?

But of course!

Thanks ever,

Mark Anderson

Wilkes-Barre PA