

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



THE PINE CONE DESIGN 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.

It's the time of year when geese are flying and squawking and landing on meadows and yards. They're pecking around across the lawn here, and a great number were resting and splashing along the Tulpehocken Creek near the spillway confluence with the Schuylkill River. Mild skies and wispy clouds. Chuck and Joanie and I are having coffee and carrot cake in the Mud Room.

Chuck is piping in music composed by the German chanteuse Ute Lemper, where she sings the words of Portuguese poet Paulo Coelho, done up nicely with a chamber music

ensemble. Coelho's words are of solidity and change, as mountains are sculpted by the wind and rain; and we change too, in our own measure of time. The song is called "Change," and there's some awesome high desert sound effects. Fade to close.

ON THE AIR

Hello everyone and welcome to the broadcast. It's a good time to reflect on the structure of worldly things: the microscopic and the majestic; the insidious and the impervious. Times are changing; and our perspective takes on a "remember when..." patina.

THE DUSTY ARCHIVES From the GRTR, Sept. 12, 2017

Here is an excerpt from the wonderful studio guest, Karen Lee, who made her way across two rivers some years ago to give us some delightful baseball chatter.

GRTR: Karen, let's pick up the thread: you've written a nice memory of your days in New York, following big-city baseball, and the Dodgers in particular. It's a gem, just as you wrote it. Would you read it for us, please?

KAREN LEE: Thanks, and here it is, baseball all those years ago.

I loved baseball (and still do). My parents were Yankee fans and our neighbor was a fan of the NY Giants. To be contrary, I said I was a Brooklyn Dodgers fan. I discovered that I really did love the Dodgers. How could I not love men called Pee Wee, Campy, Duke, Oisk and "Reliever - Clem - Labine?" The games were mostly on radio. Early on, I remember, the announcers recreated the play by play from tickertape which could be heard clacking in the background. The pre - and post -game shows were done by the great Marty Glickman. When Don Newcombe was pitching, before the first pitch Marty would say "we're witcha Newk." I waited all week to hear that. I wish I could find recordings of those broadcasts. I listened to, kept scorecards and wrote articles about almost every Dodgers game. They were day games and around 5pm. our phone would begin to ring as neighbors, home from their jobs, would call me to find out what happened in the games. I

began publishing a Dodgers newsletter, typed on my dad's old typewriter. It sold for 25 cents an issue and I had quite a few subscribers. It has been only recently that I've forgiven the Dodgers for leaving me.

I know you're just about at sign-off, so, to you and Joanie and Chuck: I had a wonderful time talking with you.

THE DUSTY ARCHIVES CONTINUED.

This next bit is from the GRTR of May 16, 2016:

THEATER GROUPS: THE FOREVER IDEA

Word has come to us from the performing arts community in New York that William Herz, Jr. passed away recently. A friend of his wrote: "Prayers for rest for a warm, intelligent man." Herz was a member of the Orson Welles-led group called The Mercury Theater, and variously The Mercury Theater on the Air, dating to the late 1930s. Herz, "a true Mercurian," almost reached the age of 100. Here is an excerpt from his obituary (*The New York Times* May 13, 2016).

Joanie reads:

William Herz, Jr., gentleman of the theatre, last surviving participant of the "War of the Worlds" broadcast, and world class curmudgeon, passed away Tuesday May 10, a few months shy of his 100th birthday. His last years were made easier by the loving care he received from Beverly and Maria. He will be missed by his friends for his wry judgments and contrary opinions. His stories about living in Orson Welles' spare bedroom, dating "Babes in Arms" soubrette Mitzi Green, dining with Pierre Monteux or Jed Harris, or frequently leaving his ticket office next to Sardi's to hear Mary Martin "raise the temperature of the theater" while singing about her wonderful guy, made 20th century theatrical history palpable.

This tribute to a member of a true ensemble group caused me to reflect on the fact that theater groups in any locale – Kalamazoo, Culpeper, or New York - thrive on the enthusiasm of having a script-in-hand; the credo being thus: "rehearse, disperse, see you at the venue!"

I went to my satchel of treasured cassettes and pulled out a favorite: The September 5, 1938 CBS broadcast of G. K. Chesterton's "The Man Who Was Thursday," rendered beautifully by the Mercury Theater on the Air. (Radio Spirits #257 1994).

The recording is unclipped, and announcer Dan Seymour tells us plenty. The broadcast was the last in the CBS summer series carried "coast-to-coast and by CBC Canada." Response had been overwhelmingly positive and the group's schedule slot had been renewed for the fall. Seymour intones, in effect, that these Monday night broadcasts signal the "first complete theatrical producing company in radio."

John Dunning, in his *On the Air: The Encyclopedia of Old-Time Radio*, gives an excellent account of the Mercury years: he writes about the WPA, "The Cradle Will Rock," John Houseman's input, and beyond. Dunning does not mention "Thursday" by title; but he quotes Houseman: "Shows were created week after week under conditions of soul and health-destroying pressure." Tight deadlines, not the least of which was for scriptwriter Howard Koch who was given six days to complete the adaptation of the H.G. Wells story "War of the Worlds" for the October 30, 1938 broadcast (Dunning 451-452).

So we might pick up on the idea that Welles wanted to produce scripts (stage or radio) of "political relevance." The Chesterton story filled the bill. It is a marvelously convoluted tale of disillusioned anarchists (circa 1910) and the manipulator who is eager to reel them in. Detectives are sent in to go undercover and the plot gets more fantastic with each scenario.

The workman-like approach will include the mastery of sound effects, and the art of adapting a script and keeping the lyricism of the story. Welles' character doubles as narrator, and thereby he can tell us of a red-haired girl tending a lilac garden; or describe a colossal man who speaks of "centuries of heroic war," and who escapes by "bouncing away like an India rubber ball." In another instance the sound effects people might have pondered how to make the elephant noises. Another action scene needs careening fire engines and sirens under the shouts of a man who forgot his boots. You might imagine that tranquility emerges as the mystery unravels, and the good guys find themselves at sun-up in a meadow, where "a crooked path or a scrap of orchard became a place from our boyhood, that we would recognize sooner than we would recognize our own mothers." Lyricism of dialogue and varied sound effects are layered with politics and philosophy to make this an enthralling story.

As luck would have it, BBC Radio 4 Extra is running a 13-part serial reading of "The Man Who was Thursday," with the venerable actor Geoffrey Palmer doing the reading in his wry and inimitable style. Part One started this week; episodes are in the BBC digital archive for listening later on. Listen up, stream it while you can!

Such good listening here! <http://bbc.co.uk>

MUSIC BRIDGE

Ute Lemper evokes the sounds of the Middle East, soaring and clashing at once, with the pulse of bongos and the dream-like plucking of the oud: Coelho's lyrics:

“The great goal is love; the rest is silence. / How can this force that moves the world / And keeps the stars in their places / Be at once so creative and so devastating?”

THE DUSTY ARCHIVES CONTINUED:

The PBS website tells us that this show ran until 2011. I liked it a lot.

History Detectives A quote from the website:

For 10 seasons our viewers asked us to solve the puzzles behind their historic objects and artifacts. Did a silicon chip bring art to the moon? Do we have the guitar Bob Dylan used to start a rock and roll revolution? Can we return a Vietnam War diary to its author's family? The investigations have taught us so many things about our nation and ourselves.

From the GRTR April 19, 2015:

HISTORY DETECTIVES

This program on PBS is always good, and the April 9th installment featured a really interesting piece on old-time radio. It began with a typewritten script for a show called “Special Agent Five,” from 1932. Learning the backstory was a treat. It involved files from the FBI, a pulp writer who put the script together, gangsters, a true bank robbery, and the early techniques of fingerprint identification. The visual hooks were gripping, with vintage clips of living rooms with families and console radios, film clips of careening sedans with gunmen on the running boards. Mug-shots, fingerprint microfilm, and file folders emerged when the show’s host interviewed archivists at the Washington office of the FBI, and at the West Virginia identification storage facility.

And who else would give us the perspective of broadcast history, but Elizabeth McLeod, historian of great renown, who has also written for our own Radio Recall. Interviewed at a recording studio on Long Island, McLeod detailed the history of “Special Agent Five,” placing it in the “Lucky Strike Hour” lineup. It was a top-ten show, good stats, and it was cool to see McLeod use her copy of the radio directory for that year. McLeod also dropped the needle on a vinyl disc she had of an “Agent 5” episode; and she let us know that the intro was Morse Code for “LS LS LS...” Good research, all around, nicely told.

MUSIC BRIDGE AND NETWORK FEED

Tori Amos is a wonderful and amazing singer-songwriter, born in North Carolina and educated in Montgomery County Maryland. Her 2011 album is stark and compelling; this song is entitled “Battle of Trees.” She is so much in tune with nature and our place in it. She sings a mystical ode to forests:

The Hawthorn blossoms as the Oak guards the door,
She is the hinge upon which the year swings.
We were insulated in a circle of words we'd drawn
With wisdom sent from nine Hazels, a Rowan fire
And a Willow rod...



Joanie is signaling network feed; thanks for listening, everyone. Let us draw upon our own strength and be mindful of others. Brighter days ahead, for sure. Soup and sandwiches in the Mud Room? But of course!

Keep those cards and letters coming!

Thanks ever,

Mark Anderson

Reading PA