

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



THE FOOTSTEPS ISSUE

MAY 14, 2019

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, 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 to find a station where you can tune in.

The rain has headed northeast and cleared the valley; it’s crisp and cool air and we see clouds and blue sky above. Chuck and Joanie had a nice drive today, across the iron bridge at Point of Rocks. A friend of the Club had an even longer drive to get here. John Abbott is our studio guest for today’s broadcast. He drove north from the Great Smokies and along the Blue Ridge and right here to the Delaware Valley.

Right now, we’re having our coffee and scones in the Mud Room. John and Chuck just finished coaxing the old sound board free of its squawks and hums;

and Joanie and I are sifting through the dusty old courier pouch. Chuck is piping in a somber folk tune by a band called The OMD, from Scotland:

“Climb the mountain of your fear / You should see the view from here /

Walk with me until we’re done / Take the long road, find your home.”

Joanie is watching the clock as it sweeps toward network feed; we go down the hall and settle in around the table. Chuck fades “The View from Here.”

ON THE AIR

Hello everyone, and welcome to the broadcast! We’re fortunate to have a guest in the studio today; it’s John Abbott, who is well-known to many folks for his research in OTR; he’s also an archivist, and an accomplished photographer. Good to see you, John!

JCA:

Thanks, Mark, nice to be here. I was driving along, looking for a road sign TIN POT STUDIO LEFT 200 FEET; but, no such thing!

GRTR:

Well, it’s the low-profile we’re after, down here by the creek. So we’ll start right in by mentioning some of your recent work with the Club. You’re not exactly center-stage, since you now live in North Carolina, but a few weeks ago you did manage to take part in the evening of script re-creations that the Club presented in Culpeper Virginia, at the Library of Congress Auditorium.

JCA:

That was a long drive, but I didn’t want to miss the fun, you know, we were all dressed in vintage costumes, the scripts, and the sound effects, audiences really like that kind of show.

GRTR:

And I heard you being interviewed on the radio a few months ago, Walden’s Internet radio program Yesterday USA, talking about your book *The Who Is Johnny Dollar Matter*. The occasion was the second edition.

JCA:

That’s right, it was good to talk about the research and all.

GRTR:

Why did you feel the need for a second edition?

JCA:

There were several reasons. First of all, there were some errors that had crept into the original 13-hundred-page manuscript. Also, there were additional stories that needed to be accounted for.

GRTR:

Let's talk for a minute about the first edition, because that was pretty much your introduction to the Club. *The Who Is Johnny Dollar Matter* is a virtual compendium of all the shows with names and details, am I right?

JCA:

Yes, it's a catalogue, and my first presentation about that first edition was at a Club meeting in 2011, and I felt really welcomed by the members, so I decided to join the Club. Ever since then I have participated in Club activities, and I've written some 18 articles for *Radio Recall*.

GRTR:

Word has it that you would help move tables around the room to get ready for the meetings (*Laughter in the studio*), and I remember one *Radio Recall* article you wrote, titled "Five Dollars and Change."

JCA:

Yes, over the years there were different actors cast in the role. But about the need to revise the manuscript, the first thing I did was to make a pilgrimage to California, to the Thousand Oaks Library, where there are several collections of "Yours Truly, Johnny Dollar" scripts. The trip was necessary because my fellow researcher Stewart Wright had discovered a collection of scripts from the Pacific Pioneer Broadcasters that included about ten scripts from the Bob Readick run, that were previously unknown.

GRTR:

Were there any audio copies of these programs?

JCA:

Unfortunately, there were none. But it was the scripts that I was after, as they allowed me to refine the canon of programs. After getting home, I started the real work, that of

trying to figure out just where the programs fit into the canon. I was able to use the Wake Forest University library computer systems to search newspaper listings for any information about what was broadcast on a given day. Stewart Wright and Dr. Joe Webb, another collector–researcher, also provided information from databases they were able to access.

GRTR:

Were you able to create a solid catalogue?

JCA:

Yes, by using the Internet, and putting in a lot of hard work, I was able to create a canon that is accurate and complete. I have accounted for every program that aired; and I documented those that were preempted. I'm still hopeful that some of the missing Johnny Dollar audio programs will surface.

GRTR:

Such detailed work! As you went along, were there any surprises that you found?

JCA:

Indeed, there were! I identified a bogus program that seems to have made its way into most catalogues. Also, with the aid of Stewart's work, we have documented a program that was written and scheduled; but it never aired, because in terms of history, the end of the "Johnny Dollar" program happened before that date.

GRTR:

Imagine, that show was such a favorite, and then, off–the–air, just like that. So, in researching materials, of all the tools available, which was the most valuable?

JCA:

There is no doubt that the Internet is the most valuable tool a researcher can use, but then, it takes some time to find the best sites and tools, and to figure out what information is real and what is bogus. As more and more resources come online –such as digitized newspapers – there are more rocks to look under for tidbits of valuable information. I started work on the first edition of my Johnny Dollar catalogue in the year 2000; so, the Internet was not the same tool then as it has become over the years.

GRTR:

Very much the case! Now, about another book that you wrote a few years ago, I found the May 2014 GRTR, where we talked about it, and so that I can remind our listeners, the book has the intriguing title *Following the OWL's Footsteps*, and here is the way you described it in that issue of GRTR. Quoting the GRTR, May 2014, I'm going to have Joanie read the interview excerpt. Joanie, to the microphone, please:

JOANIE

The O.W.L. refers to O. Winston Link, who was an industrial photographer in the 1950's. Link published several iconic books of steam railroading on the Norfolk and Western Railroad. What made Link's photos unique is that he photographed at night. John liked the Link photographs so much that he researched the location of each photo, and then went back and photographed the same sites as they appear today.

GRTR:

Thanks, Joanie, nicely done. So, when your footsteps took you to places that Link had been, what did you find different from Link's original site?

JCA:

A great deal had changed over the course of 50 some years. Unpaved roads then, had been paved and in some cases even moved. Many of the buildings are gone, and even the railroad for the Abingdon Branch in North Carolina is now gone. At least I was able to find the sites I was looking for. Many of the photos look the same, the main difference is that I photographed during the day, and Link photographed at night. All things considered, I was amazed that many of the sites that Link chose were physically really close to roadways.

GRTR:

About other projects, you mentioned that you're writing a radio play. Can you tell us about that?

JCA:

I've always been impressed by the art of scriptwriting, and I read an article in a magazine that I thought for sure would make a nice radio play. It's now under development, as they say, but basically, it's a dramatic story that involves a small-town police department and an apparent attempt to commit a perfect crime. The essence of

the plot, I'll keep secret for now, but I'm aiming to complete the script, and have it performed by the MWOTRC players sometime later this year.

GRTR:

Earlier today you told me that you photographed the solar eclipse, which was the big event of 2017. Driving to Summerton South Carolina must have been an easy trip from your place in North Carolina.

JCA:

Yes, I had spent almost a year getting my gear together and choosing the best place, which was the Santee Wildlife Refuge, for me and about a thousand other people! Just prior to the event it looked like we would be clouded out. But just before the eclipse started, the clouds parted, and the sky was clear for the whole time.

GRTR:

So your planning paid off!

JCA:

Yes, it did, but I made one mistake. Once totality arrived, I made the mistake of taking my eyes off the camera; and I looked at the Sun. At that point my brain fell to my toes and I was mesmerized by what I saw. I did recover in time to complete a series during Totality, and I got a pretty good photographic record of the eclipse, start to finish. Everyone who witnesses a total eclipse says the event is almost magical. Myself, I think that those folks are drastically understating the effect. The photos are on my website:

<http://www.humealumni.org>

GRTR:

Thanks, John, this has been a great talk, a wealth of information. Joanie is signaling us for commercial break.

DAYTON DRAGONS BASEBALL

The Dragons are playing hard, but still losing a lot of close games. In baseball lore this is called The Early Season Swoon. The coaches are intent on improving the youngsters' skills and their focus. Meanwhile, the front office continues to sponsor community events, for example: Days at the Ball Park to honor children in treatment; first responders; and hometown heroes.

MUSIC FROM SANTA BARBARA

A recital by violinist extraordinaire Lucia Micarelli is amazing; the live recording that I have is energetic and poignant. Lucia's playing, the ensemble backing her; and her choice of music is beyond compare. Chuck is piping in a jazz standard "Spring Can Really Hang You Up the Most," a melancholy look at life when the joys of a spring day are distant, and you feel stranded.

That's the feeling we have now; the somber feeling of losing a friend. John has joined Chuck and Joanie and me and we are reflecting on the life of a grand fellow, Tim Acord, who passed away a few days ago, after a long illness.

Tim was a long-time Club member, always friendly to everyone at meetings, enjoying every minute. Mark Bush wrote a very nice appreciation of Tim, his place in the world and his good works for the Club. Mark wrote that Tim was highly valued in his career; but for Tim and his wife Roni, family life and love for their daughter Kaleigh was active and abiding. Kaleigh is a promising violinist, taking advanced classes and playing in all manner of ensembles. Tim would always tell me about his daughter's burgeoning career and email me the details. I would write it up in GRTR. Tim was pleased. And Kaleigh is carrying on the love, in the company of great young musicians.

CODA AND NETWORK FEED

Lucia Micarelli often puts down her violin, and sings. Here is her recital rendition of "Time After Time," the Sammy Cahn and Jule Styne favorite.

After following John's journey to the firmament with his camera, we can round out the broadcast by taking a walk on Calum's Road with pick and shovel. An industrious old Scot on the Isle of Raasay built a road by hand.



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

Mark Anderson

