

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



THE SCRIPTS IN THE DUST ISSUE
SEPTEMBER 19, 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. Chuck is piping in the frantic dance orchestration of Aaron Copland’s “Rodeo,” with soaring raw strings and xylophone, helped along by a pulsing string bass. The album is Copland’s music for ballet, called “Populist,” just the ticket to get us thinking of the arid high plains of the American west, away from the thunderstorms coursing their way through the valleys and rivers of the Atlantic seaboard.

We’re in the Mud Room with our coffee and Danish, looking through the dusty courier pouch. No leaking roof on our tinpot studio, but there’s a bit of pooling under the trees out back by the creek. Joanie is watching the clock as it

sweeps toward network feed. Good news has come to us about the Mid-Atlantic Nostalgia Convention which wrapped up Saturday night the 15th to great acclaim from folks who enjoyed three days of bustling around amidst vendors, celebrities, performances, interviews, presentations, and favorite films. We have an announcement from our Cub audio-cassette librarian; we'll learn about the Sarnoff collection and RCA; and then we'll look at a radio series – “The Six-Shooter,” and a film “The Misfits” to find the strength of their scripts.

ON THE AIR

Joanie has signaled network feed and we're settling in at the table. Chuck fades the familiar chords of “Appalachian Spring.”



Hello everyone, and welcome to the broadcast. Here's a message from Rebecca Jones, the Audio-cassette Librarian for the MWOTRC:

At the August meeting the club members present voted to disband the club's cassette library due to rental inactivity over the past few years. In an effort to keep as much as we can from hitting the landfill I would like to offer the members the opportunity to take entire series of their choosing on a first come- first serve basis. For the price of shipping I will mail you all the episodes we have of your favorite program. Please contact me at audio@mwotrc.com.

Thanks,
Rebecca Jones
Coordinating Audio Librarian, MWOTRC

Great opportunity! Cassettes are still a viable format for collecting shows! And here, just for the cost of shipping. Decide on your favorites and get in touch!

MUSIC BRIDGE AND COMMERCIAL

Chuck pipes in another melody from the “Populist” album, “Appalachian Spring” which makes us sigh as we look over our Dayton Dragons season summary. The team went into a late-season slump and finished 16 games under .500. They had great pitching (Hunter Greene’s right-handed heater fooled ‘em plenty) but his teammates couldn’t score enough runs. Fifth Third Stadium again held the spotlight for inventive entertainment (acrobats, a mascot contest) and community-minded events: they honored the military men from a local base in a ceremony at home plate.

Most notable, and this was written up in the *New York Times*, was the milestone that radio announcer Tom Nichols reached. For eleven years Tom has been the voice of the Dragons, and in August he called his 4,000th game. That got him an invitation to the radio booth for the parent club Cincinnati Reds, where he helped on the play-by-play for a 9-7 Reds victory. Tom grew up in Muncie Indiana, where he listened to every radio baseball broadcast he could find on the dial. Folks can still tune in to every Dragons game on radio: Fox Sports 980 WONE.

FIELD TRIP TO NEW JERSEY



I read about it in the paper: Open House at The College of New Jersey, and it turned out to be a wonderful afternoon. I was among 24 enthusiasts and the

curator gave us a lively and informative tour. The large room housed the artifacts from the years of RCA and the vision and innovation of David Sarnoff. Here was the hardware; the library of RCA's books and research papers was given to a museum in Delaware. But the evolution of communications technology was evident, display after display. Sarnoff supervised the improvements in the products; he also had a keen eye for figuring how to market them.

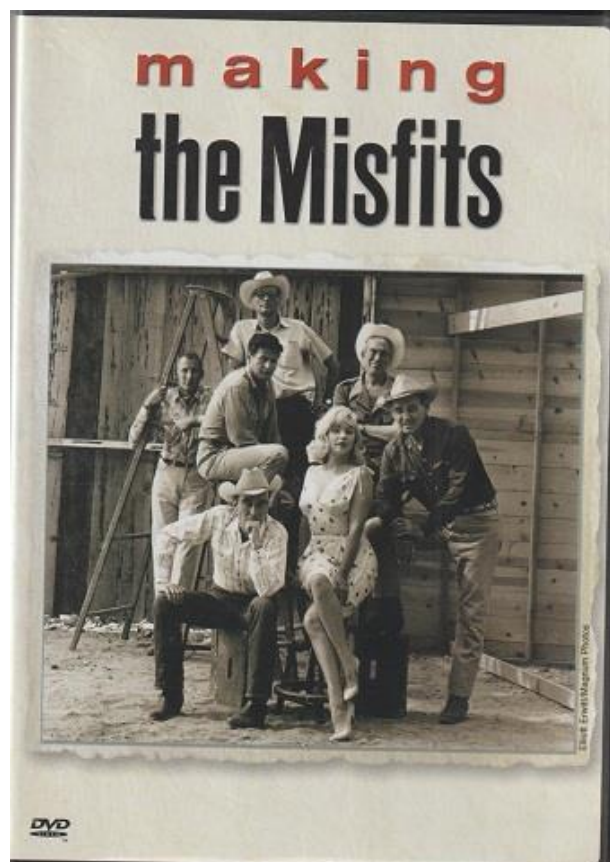
On display in the room was a magazine advertisement for a new type of radio from 1932, which heralded "bi-acoustic" capability. "Great for music" was the pitch, because the new technology gave "two more octaves" of fidelity. "Loud or soft, it's all there," the ad proclaimed.

More difficult to market to the public was the bulky video disc player, which used the groove process of transmitting images. Items were getting smaller, it seemed. We saw vacuum tubes and mini-vacuum tubes, and then transistors. The first ever "color television picture tube, 1949," seemed not so small, but its importance was unparalleled, even if the early color images were irregular, streaky, and often green comets would dart across the screen. Biggest of the RCA inventions on display was the electron microscope, which had its own alcove and towered over us. Many people had questions for the curator, and discussion followed. I drifted away, content in learning the societal impact of technology, if not totally up-to-speed on the details.

TWO SCRIPTS AND A HOST OF STARS

There are several parallels to be found in the radio show "Six Shooter" (1953-1954) and the film "The Misfits." (1961) Each had a Hollywood leading man, James Stewart and Clark Gable. Both had writers (Frank Burt and Arthur Miller) who were 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. Burt was up to the task

of writing true ensemble roles. Gable had an arguably more contentious group around him: Marilyn Monroe, Montgomery Clift, Thelma Ritter, and Eli Wallach. Director John Huston and producer Frank Taylor were arbiters among the troubled few. In the PBS documentary “Making the Misfits” (WNET New York 2001, 55 min. B&W) film clips, still photos, and insightful interviews tell us about these people, the Reno Nevada location, and the way it all hung together to produce a remarkable film.



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.

In "The Misfits," Gable's character, Gay Langland, explains to Roslyn (Monroe) his idea of a morning in the Nevada scenery: "You go outside, you whistle, you throw stones at a can; you just live!" Arthur Miller said that he was impressed by the long stretches of sand and scrub, that made people seem indistinct. He also makes clear that in that vastness, it is not so much one's desires, but one's introspection that counts. Tony Huston, an assistant to his father on the film, says that Miller wrote the script as an "essay in light." Eli Wallach says that Miller "had written a valentine for Marilyn, a love piece." Wallach continues to typify it as "an aria of pain;" in effect, the entire script is a tribute to characters trying to ease one another's pain.

Gay and Roslyn stay together at a house in the desert. Gay has become domesticated. He tells Roslyn that he had never done anything for a woman, not cooked nor cleaned nor planted a garden. An argument between the two takes shape and runs throughout the story. Roslyn is against killing. For Gay it is a way of life: keeping rabbits out of your garden; and he tells her that ranchers are keen on keeping predators away from their lambs. He accuses her of "always trying to change things." Gay and his friend Guido (Wallach) want to go into the hills to chase down wild horses to sell to middle men. They call it mustanging. Used to fetch good money, in the old days.

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 has written an excellent essay on this series, in *Radio Rides the Range*, edited by Jack French and David Siegel, McFarland, 2014, 167-169. 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.

Gaylord Langland's refrain in Miller's story is that: "...they've changed everything..." His specialty is roping, and he's upset that rodeos have changed: too loud, too commercial. He won't sign on for wages; he doesn't want anyone telling him what to do. Early in the film, Roslyn asks him, "You got something against educated women?" Gay has no reply; things have surely changed.

Even mustanging is a vestige of a vanished life. Miller is sure to write in the script that 15 horses is all they find, in real life of that era worth no more than a "pittance." The location footage of the high desert chase is grueling. The ASPCA has a man on the set to monitor the rough-and-tumble roping. It's the horses that are on the clock: "OK, that's a wrap!". Gable, however, did not give

way to a stunt man; he himself gets dragged around, to the horror of his wife and everyone else. It takes a toll on his life.

The film is nearing the end. Gay listens to Roslyn and cuts the horses loose. Guido snarls "...what's next, back to town and look for wages?" It's night under a starry sky. Gay and Roslyn drive back to town. They probably won't stay together. Everyone has unleashed their rancor towards everyone else. Who's to say if she will find a bungalow and a yard where she can feel unburdened and free? Gay most likely will breath the fresh air and look for work. Roslyn asks Gay how he can find the highway back to town. He points to a star and says, "Follow that star. The highway's right underneath it."

Arthur Miller has given us his impressions of the west; Frank Burt affords us the same insight: determination, defiance, and realization, circling around to the kindness found in every human heart.



Thanks for tuning in, folks! We're headed to network feed with the urgent strains of a Copland dance. Keep those cards and letters coming! Soup and sandwiches in the Mud Room? But of course! Mark A.