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**FADEAWAY #21** is a fanzine devoted to science fiction and related fields of interest, and is produced by **Robert Jennings, 29 Whiting Rd., Oxford, MA 01540-2035, email [fabficbks@aol.com](mailto:fabficbks@aol.com)** . Copies are available to for a letter of comment, or a print fanzine in trade, or by subscription at a cost of \$15.00 for six issues. Letters of comment are much preferred. Any person who has not previously received a copy of this fanzine may receive a sample copy of the current issue for free by sending me your name and address. Publication is bi-monthly, but I make step up the schedule whenever I feel the urge. This is the January-February 2011 issue. This issue will also be distributed thru the Southern Fandom Press Alliance mailing #280.

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**WINTER WONDERLANDS & OTHER BALD-FACED LIES** For those of you have written inquiring about the burst of bitter winter weather the New England area has been experiencing, inquiring about health, hearth and home and like that, hey, don't worry. It's winter in New England, and during winter in this part of the country we get snow, lots of it. We also get violent winds, so all that hurricane force gusting you've been seeing on those national news shows is actually stuff we have to go thru pretty much every year at about this same time.

The TV footage sure makes it look brutal, but hey, we ought to be used to it by now. And we also ought to be used to breathless news-casters filling in dull days with scenes of typical New England weather. It's nothing unique, it's nothing bizarre. But thanks to everyone who emailed and inquired anyway.

Winter snowfalls are great stuff if you happen to be a small child. Here are mountains of fluffy white stuff to play with and in. It's cold, wet, messy, and pliable. It sticks to itself so you can build snowmen, snow forts, and snowballs. You can slide on it, ski on it, and under the right kind of sunlight it looks beautiful. What could be better?

Unfortunately the wonders of snow fade very rapidly the older you get. Grown-ups know that snow is wet, cold and dangerous. It is a major driving hazard and it can create bone breaking falls when you try to walk in it, or heart attacks when you try to shovel it. The bitter cold and blowing snow also encourages the development of respiratory diseases including but hardly limited to flu and pneumonia plus it also aggravates conditions like arthritis and bursitis, diseases of which most children are blissfully unaware. Snow ain't fun if you're a grown-up..

During these times of year one's thots turn immediately to warmer, sunnier places where snow is a rarity. Costa Rica let us say. Or at least Miami Beach. Unfortunately as glorious as those visions may be, it appears unlikely that yours truly will be moving from the winter realms to anyplace else anytime soon.

The spoils, as well as the obligations of adulthood preclude that. In my case I have this house, which is full of a lifetime accumulation of science fiction, comics, movie serials, dime novels, classic radio shows and the assorted equipment to make use of it all. There are also a few sticks of furniture and some appliances scattered round here and there as well.

In addition to that I have this warehouse full of books and videos which I sell to make a living. Disposing of all this accumulated crap would take a lot more effort than I want to expend. Then too, I would have to check out that hacienda in Costa Rica and arrange transportation, passports, bank transfers, spend time acquiring new junk to make it livable, and go thru all the other tiresome hassles of moving from here to there. It's more work than I want to go thru, at least right now.

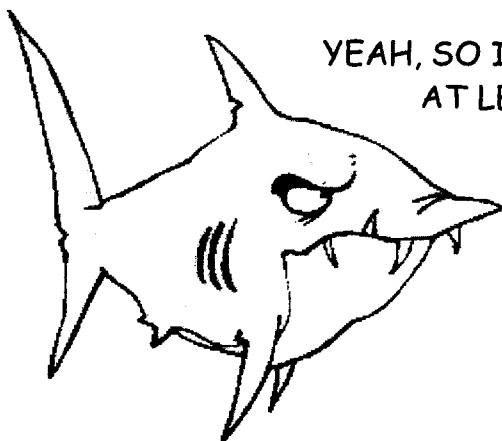
A couple of years ago I was in a much more receptive frame of mind about moving out of New England. Back in December of 2008 a tremendous ice storm swept thru the region downing thousands of power lines and trees, shutting off power for this entire area and turning all the roads into lethal skating rinks.

Responding with that dedicated sense of responsibility which modern corporations are so noted for, it was discovered that the local power companies had sort of loaned out most of their line technicians and engineers to some neighboring power conglomerates down in Pennsylvania and western New York, and also parts of Ohio. So they didn't have many people here to take care of the emergency, in fact, almost none. It also turned out they didn't have much of an emergency response plan which they had always claimed they had in all their publicity flyers and which, just incidentally, happens to also be required by state and federal law.

It turned out that it took not hours, but days, multiple days, to get the power restored to the region. In my part of that region there was no power for five and a half days. The newspapers and the TV news people had a field day. Blustering publicity hungry politicians had a field day too. At least that's what I was told. It was kind of hard to judge myself, since there was no power, and thus, no way to access that broadcast frenzy, altho the newspaper devoted ten or twelve pages a day to the situation, becoming more and more hysterical as the time wore on. Some parts of the area didn't get power restored for almost two weeks.

That was when I actually did some serious thinking about closing up shop and moving someplace else. Some of my neighbors on this street did exactly that. A few others tried, but were unable to sell their houses. A couple of people I barely knew just closed their houses up, turned the keys over to the bank that held their mortgage and left anyway.

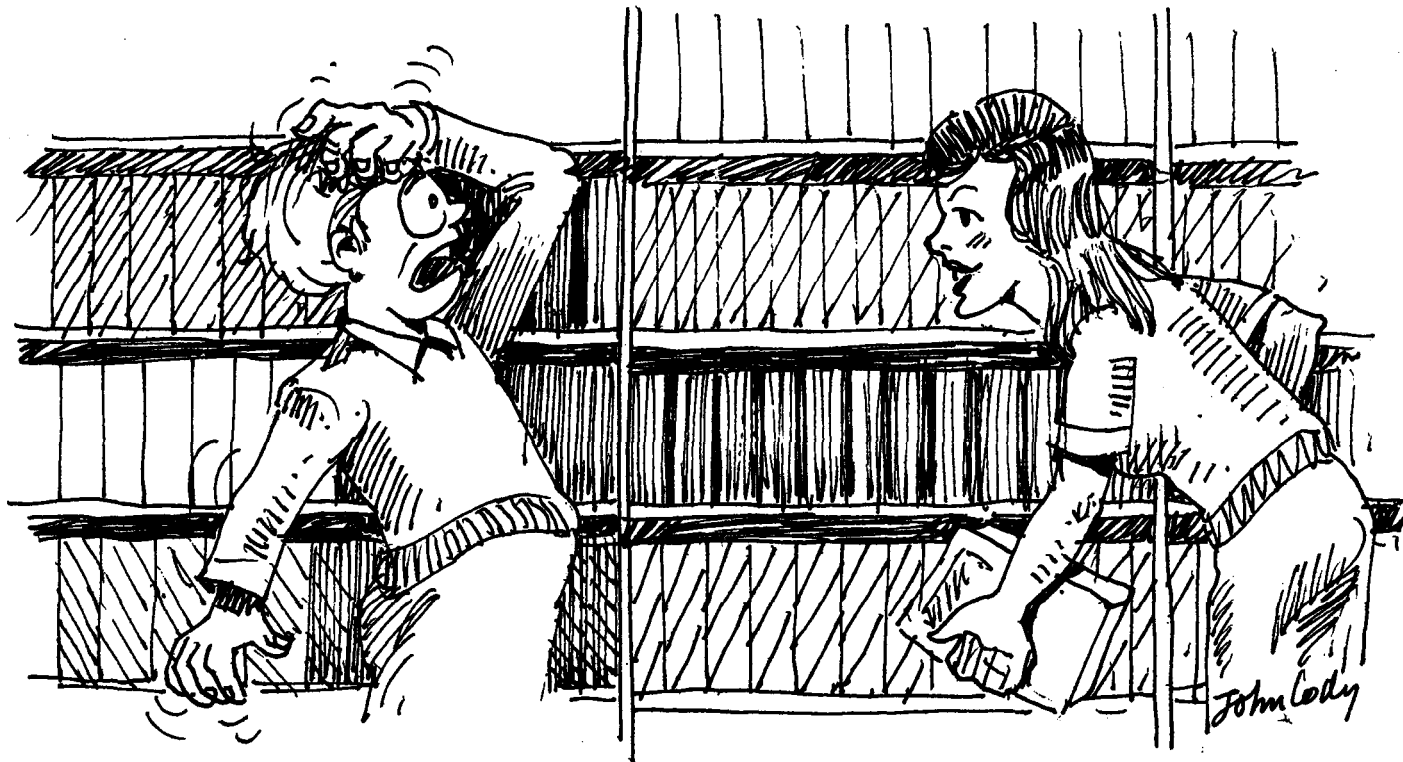
But all that is just a bitter memory now. Hopefully this year's winter wonderland won't be anywhere near as bad that that.



YEAH, SO I'M A SHARK!  
AT LEAST WE DON'T GO ROUND  
KILLING EACH OTHER OFF  
TRYING TO PROVE  
THAT OUR GOD IS MORE  
LOVING AND JUST  
THAN YOUR GOD

NOT MUCH LEFT  
OVER ROOM But  
I do want to remind  
everyone, yet again, that  
this fanzine appears six  
times per year, which  
means we print a lot of  
material, which means we  
could articles or reviews,  
and art to fill these issues.  
Please contact me at the  
address on the front cover  
by either email or regular  
mail.

# BOOK BENDER



I rearranged all the books so the spine colors match; all the red ones together, all the blue ones together, it makes the whole room look so much better

Book reviews of stuff I have recently read, and book reviews from others who care to contribute are a regular feature of this fanzine. I read a lot of different books on a lot of different subjects. While I buy most of the books reviewed herein, I certainly do not buy all of them. I make full use of the local public library, and I suggest that you do likewise. My experience is that the folks who operate libraries are very interested in what their customers want to read, and if they do not have a particular book you want in stock at the moment, they might well be inclined to buy it. At the least they will get you a copy to read thru inter-library loan. No book is too obscure, or too specialized, or too esoteric to be tracked down. Your comments on these reviews are always appreciated.

**THE LEGENDARY LYDECKER BROTHERS; by Jan Alan Henderson; 186 pages; 7x10" Trade Paperback; self published with ISBN #1453735372; \$24.95---Review by Blackie Seymour**

This is a great title for a book and a subject matter that has been long overdue. The Lydecker brothers, Howard and Theodore, were the special effects men who created movie magic for Republic Studios for almost thirty years including all their legendary serials and most of the studio's long string of feature films

Jan Henderson is in love with the Republic serials, a fact which is terribly obvious from the opening chapter. In fact Mr. Henderson should have more properly called his book "How I spent my childhood watching Republic serials", or perhaps "Serials the Lydecker brothers worked on."

The title of this book leads one to believe that the volume is about them, personally. But there is little information about them here. The inference is also that the book might explain how the Lydeckers created some of their legendary special effects, but there isn't much background information about that here either. There is much more information in other reference books which have previously printed, particularly the Jack Mathis book "Republic Confidential: The Studio."

Mr. Henderson did have access to the son of Theodore Lydecker, a childhood friend, and there a number of interesting background photos adorning this book. But except for mentioning almost every serial Republic produced, and highlighting a few of the spectacular effects in those serials (information which anybody with any knowledge or appreciation of old serials would already be aware of) there is precious little information about special effects or movie making, or the lives of the Lydecker brothers here at all. Perhaps I am being too harsh. There is some background information, but it is information already well known and circulated within the movie collecting hobby. The earliest serial under the Republic logo was "Darkest Africa", which features a lost city protected by a swarm of flying batmen. Mr. Henderson notes that those batmen were made of wood, rubber or paper mache, a description which certainly leaves the reader a little confused as to the actual construction of the batmen. In his description of the spectacular Rocketman serials, he mentions how the Rocket-man's long flights were accomplished, by string-ing wire from power line towers on the California hills, and letting the dummy glide down at a 45 degree angle, but that's virtually all the back-ground information provided. There are some nice photos to along with this brief explanation.

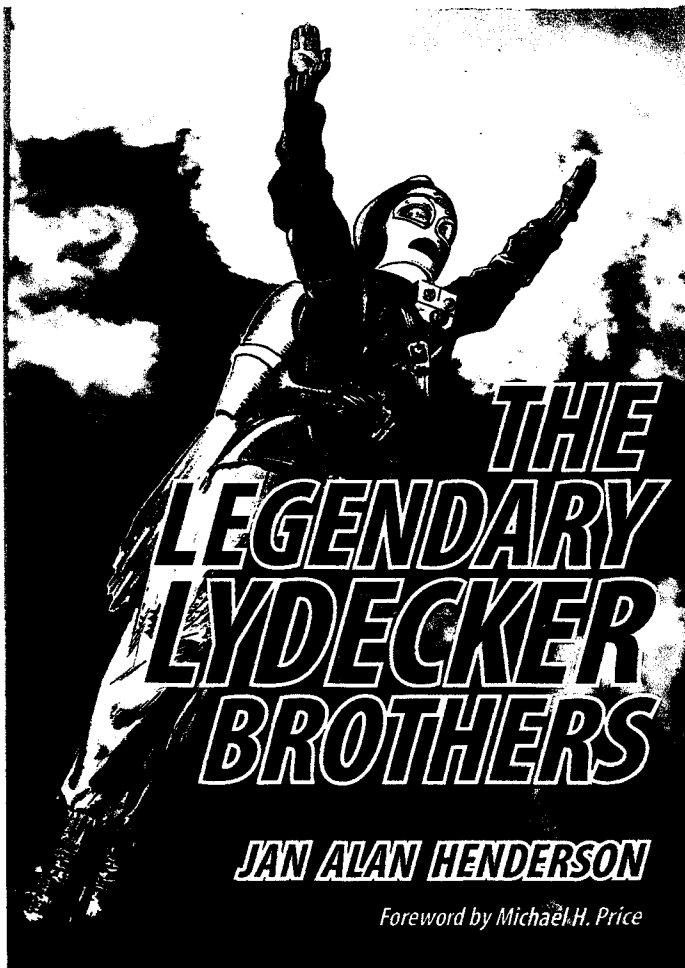
In a discussion of the Captain Marvel serial he mentions that the flying dummy of Captain Marvel was made out of paper mache and fitted with internal tubing thru which cables were strung along it to glide along wires controlled by a pulley.

There are mentions made of volcanic eruptions and assorted building explosions, achieved using gasoline filled balloons with timing devices, but nothing beyond that very brief explanation of how those effects were made..

There are many excellent photos in this volume, but the revelations of what effects were used to get those photos, or the mechanics of how those special effects were created is almost always lacking.

What we do get are brief reviews of every Republic serial along with mentions of a few prominent cliffhangers and explosions in each serial. Coverage of the Republic feature films is almost completely absent.

This whole book is a sort of fuzzy feel-good trip down memory lane for Mr. Henderson of all the wonderful serials he saw accompanied by a selection of photos from each serial, some of which may be background shots. If you want a book of serial related photos this is the book for you. If you want a book that talks about the lives of the Lydecker brothers or how they created all those wonderful special effects you'll have to wait until somebody else writes it.



**STORMY WEATHER—THE LIFE OF LENA HORNE; James Gavin; Atria Books/Simon and Schuster; hardback; 320 pages; \$27.00**

---Review by Robert Jennings

I read a lot of biographies, and I can say without reservation that this is one of the most depressing, yet most fascinating books I have read in many a year.

Lena Horne, who died just a few months ago, on 9 May, 2010, was one of the pivotal entertainment personalities of the twentieth century. She was one of the first and most successful black women to come onto the public scene during that turbulent period. She was a star of the Cotton Club Revues, she was a big band singer with several famous orchestras both Negro and white, she was signed as a movie star by MGM in a nationally advertised promotional campaign at a hefty salary. She left MGM when they couldn't place her in movies as anything else except a torch singer doing one song spots in fluffy Technicolor musicals. She became a nationally recognized nightclub jazz singer who made numerous TV appearances, and was recognized as a champion of black rights, the poster child of the NAACP thru most of her life, and in her own words, one of the most unhappy women on the face of the earth.

Along the way she had numerous affairs with intelligent and prominent men of all races, married several times, gave birth to two children, and in a long series of interviews and biographies rewrote and recreated her life dozens of times, changing almost everything anybody ever knew about her to conform to her most recent self image at the time the latest interview or biography was being created.

James Gavin is a dedicated researcher specializing in the fields of theater and jazz, and he has done an extraordinary job of digging deep down to get the real facts about the life of Lena Horne, a woman who is more of an enigma than almost anyone else to come out of show business. With tireless dedication he has chased down original documents, press write-ups, personal letters and more. He has interviewed the people who actually knew Ms Horne at every stage of her life and emerge with what is certainly the most complete and most accurate biography of Lena Horne ever published.

Born of middle class parents in the black Bedford-Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn, her grandmother, Cora Calhoun, was a formidable personality who married a white man, yet hated white people and dedicated her life to advancing the cause of Negro rights. She insisted that her two children and Lena, her grand child, be educated, be prim and proper, never show emotion in public, and always uphold the dignity of their race.

Her son, Edwin "Teddy" Horne, Lena's father, figured out at an early age that the path to success lay in gambling, specifically, operating the gambling. A large percentage of the black community gambled, and in a relatively short period of time he had become a numbers and gambling kingpin who was able to branch out and buy legitimate businesses to launder his gambling earnings.

He married Edna Scottran, daughter of inventor Samuel R. Scottran. She was a black woman of extremely fair complexion who could easily pass as white or Latino, but "Teddy" abandoned her and his family when Lena was only three years old. Periodically he would reappear to visit Lena, to give her a present, take her out to movies or entertain her for a few days, then he would disappear again. Lena wondered what she had done to drive him away.



Lena's mother had been on the stage, and decided to return to a career in show business, dragging her young daughter along with her on the road as she made the rounds of traveling vaudeville, minstrel shows and touring stage troops. Often Lena was left with her grandmother, who was cold and distant, but even that was better than being on the road with her mother touring the chitlin' circuit in the south where violent racism made an indelible mark on the young girl. As black actors, they were the lowest rung of black society, considered little better than traveling troupes of thieves and prostitutes. When the going got too rough, or the scant stage work dried up, Edna would drop Lena off with friends or acquaintances while she followed the call of the footlights.

For a couple of years she was in the care of her uncle, who was the dean of students at a Negro junior college in Fort Valley, Georgia. But most of those interludes were with families living in abject poverty, people who barely could take care of their own, let alone the added burden of yet another mouth to feed. These abandonments could last anywhere from a few weeks to a year or more. In at least one of those situations Lena was sexually abused.

Lonely, frightened, and feeling completely unloved, she was also harassed by other children because of her light complexion. Books became her only friends. She was an excellent student, when she was allowed to attend school, but she also learned never to allow herself to become emotionally close to anyone, because she never knew when her mother would suddenly reappear and haul her off to another touring stage show or ship her back to New York to live in the cold and brittle care of her grandmother.

On one of her sojourns in New York, mother Edna noticed that her daughter was pretty when she smiled. He immediately turned into the stereotypical stage mother, and pushed Lena into show business. First, she got her an audition which led to a job as a dancer in the chorus line for the 1933 Cotton Club show, despite the fact that Lena didn't really know any dance steps, and also despite the fact that she was under age, barely sixteen years old at the time. Convinced she had been hired only because of her light skin and her pretty smile, Lena forced herself to learn how to dance.

The Cotton Club was run by New York racketeers. Lena quickly learned to abhor gangsters, who were even more racist than the rest of the white population. Indeed, the Cotton Club was a bigot's fantasy. Inside it resembled in every way an ante bellum plantation house, and except for one lonely "family table" back near the kitchen entrance, only white people were allowed in as patrons. Beautiful black girls, scantily clad, along with talented black musicians performed on command for the gawking white audiences. The pay was low, and working conditions were poor, but in the middle of the Depression it was money coming in, and hundreds of black performers both male and female frantically auditioned each month for the chance to appear in one of their revues.

Whenever anyone was sick, or there was any opening, Edna always insisted that her daughter Lena could fill in. One day Lena got a chance to sing. She wasn't very good, but she looked so pretty under the spotlight that nobody seemed to care. She got paid more money for singing, so she took singing lessons.

Her singing improved enough to be signed with Noble Sissle's big band, but she privately believed she was hired to be part of the stage setting rather than for her singing talent. Later she worked with Charlie Barnett and other bands. She released some records, none of them particularly notable.

She was acutely aware that her singing voice lacked range and depth. She was too reserved and proper to ever sing the blues, but she could do torch songs, pop, swing, jazz. She got a lot of practice. The guys in the bands she worked with helped her out. They knew music, and she didn't. But she learned. Along the way she attracted the attention of the black press who were anxious to spotlight the career of any Negro personality in those troubled times. A pretty song bird like Lena, liked by both white and black audiences filled the bill perfectly.

She got married to Louis Jordon Jones in 1937. He was an up and coming lawyer on the Pittsburgh political scene. This marriage was a disaster, even tho it produced two children, a boy and a girl. Jones' career was stymied by the racism of the period, and Lena knew absolutely nothing about keeping house, or being a wife. She couldn't even cook, and by all accounts Jones was a brutal lover who took out his frustrations on his famous wife. Lena fled back to show business, first to bring home much needed income, but mostly to get away from Jones. They separated officially in 1940, but did not get a divorce until 1944 after a bitter, prolonged and vicious series of battles over the children and finances. The battles over the children continued for the rest of their lives.

She sang at the Café Society in New York City, a famous left-wing fully integrated night club where the owner and famous fellow musicians dramatically improved her singing style and stage presence.

She became a regular singer on "The Chamber Music Society of Lower Basin Street", a radio program that spoofed high-brow opera broadcasts while offering up hot pop and swing tunes. She was on that show for six months and then she got a contract to make movies with MGM based on her fame in the black press and her success with white audiences in New York.

By this point in her life the casual blatant racism of the times had been the primary force shaping her life. She became acquainted with Walter White, head of the NAACP. White was a tall man with blonde hair and blue eyes. You would never guess he was one quarter Negro, but he was intensely proud of his black heritage, and he was also determined to do everything in his power to advance the cause of Negro civil rights. As head of the NAACP he recognized that in Lena Horne he had a willing partner, a publicly recognized figure admired by both white and black audiences who could help advance the cause of Negro civil rights. One of his biggest goals was changing Hollywood movie studios and their obvious racist film policies.

Hollywood was just as anxious to adopt a brighter public image. Black audiences loved the movies, but there were virtually no famous Negro movie personalities. Lena had made a couple of low budget all-black pics before, neither any good, but now she was picked for a major role in "Cabin in the Sky", the movie adaptation of the famous all-black Broadway music hit. Her first appearance was in 1942 in "Panama Hattie", then she sang the lead song in "Stormy Weather", a song that was to become her signature thru the years, a song she very rapidly came to loathe. "Cabin in the Sky" allowed her to do some acting. It was a major role, but it was obvious that she was not much of an actor, however she got to sing several songs in the film, altho her best number was cut because it was deemed too provocative.

And that was about the height of her movie career. MGM had no idea where to place a female black actor, and Lena absolutely refused to play the part of a maid or menial. Altho the back newspapers and magazines buzzed for years about possible roles, both leading and supporting, or special projects that were going to feature Lena Horne and other black actors, as a matter of fact MGM had no plans for her at all.

Despite the obvious racism on the Hollywood studio lot, Lena made friends with many personalities in the MGM musical division, referred to as the Freed unit, after its director. She formed a life long friendship with Ava Gardner, an actress who considered herself nothing but poor white trash and suffered from the same low self image that plagued Lena. Primarily thru the efforts of friends like Vincente Minnelli Lena was showcased in a long string of fluffy musicals, where she was given one song with a big production number.

But she discovered that in the south some theaters cut her songs out. In some white theaters Lena Horne was deemed too sexy for white audiences to see. Some local censorship boards, such as the one that controlled Memphis, automatically cut out any black performer who was not shown in a subservient role. It was horrifying to Lena and frustrating to MGM.

During WWII she became an enthusiastic booster of the USO, and performed at lots of black military camps across the country with the full support of MGM. If they couldn't give her roles in pictures, at least her name and fame reflected well on MGM when she appeared at those shows. She made the Tuskegee Airmen her special mascots, but she was horrified at the blatant racism in the military.

She also volunteered to perform on Armed Forces radio programs, where she sang sexy come-hither love songs and received tons of fan mail. Ironically nobody seemed to think that a black woman singing suggestive romantic ballads to a mostly white military audience was violating any taboos.

Along the way she had affairs with dozens of men, mostly intelligent, influential, famous men. Race didn't matter when it came to sex, and generally her affairs were hushed up by MGM and sympathetic members of the press corps. She also made enemies with her hostility to the studio caste system and the thin veneer of cordiality thruout Hollywood that barely covered the ugly prejudice that lurked beneath.

She wasn't making many movies, but she was performing in nightclubs, and honing her act. She became what she thought she could never become, an accomplished singer. The nightclub floor was where Lena Horne found her true calling. There was a rapport between a singer up close on a stage and an audience just beyond the light of that stage. The undeniable aura and beauty that everyone who ever met Lena Horne in person immediately felt could come into full play in a night club setting. She couldn't seem to project that special aura onto records, and while movie cameras could convey some of it, in person at supper clubs she became the star she longed to be.



Bobby Short, also a singer and her friend over the years summed it up very clearly: "Lena performed in one of the toughest venues in show business; the middle of a nightclub floor. Here she is, a beautiful black woman, singing songs of love. At ringside are egos and libidos being brandished quite openly. How could she help but notice the reaction she's eliciting? If it weren't the men who were leering at her, it's the wives saying to the men, 'You'd like a little piece of that wouldn't you?' *That's* what being in a nightclub is about. It is *hell!* People are not sitting there with their arms folded. They have their arms around somebody or their hands are in somebody's lap. And they're probably two sheets to the wind. You must come out in the first two minutes and grab their attention and hold it. You've got to have your act totally in tow, and never swerve from it."

Lena Horne hated nightclubs, she hated her voice, she didn't think she was pretty. She described her body as being "no tits and a big ass", yet she mastered singing. She had an uncanny ability to sense the mood of the audience from the moment she walked onto the stage, and she knew how to manipulate it. In time she became the reigning symbol of black feminine glamour, and she became the undisputed queen of supper club singers.

Within a few more years she had completely mastered the venue, by creating a unique Lena Horne personality that completely dominated the stage and the audience. She had so mastered her act, her singing style, and the sexual nuances of the music that she was commanding some of the biggest salaries in the nation for a club singer, with every female singer in show business, black and white, trying to imitate her style and delivery.

Polly Bergen noted that by the middle of the 1950s "Lena walked on a stage and grabbed every man by the balls. It was absolutely mesmerizing. But there was something unapproachable about her sexuality. And I think women saw that, and didn't feel threatened by her". As Gavin notes in this book, Lena Horne actually empowered women, because all her sexual innuendo involved what *she* wanted.

She got married in 1947 to Lennie Hayton, a white composer, musician, and arranger; one of the top men at the Freed unit at MGM. They had a passionate affair that began before he was officially divorced. He kept telling her he loved her and wanted to make her his wife. It took four years before she finally believed him. They married in France and kept the marriage a secret from everyone except family and very close friends. Inter racial marriage was illegal in 37 of the 48 states, including California where they lived. Her father was so disgusted that his daughter had married a white man he wouldn't speak to her again for months.

She was also increasingly involved with left wing causes, particularly communist sponsored organizations. She wasn't alone. For many black personalities it seemed that the Communist Party was the only group that was actually trying to do anything about bigotry and racism in the United States. The Communist Party had a daily newspaper with a nationwide circulation, and it always spoke out against racial inequality and made constant demands for equal rights and anti-lynching laws. Back in the thirties and forties there were a lot of people of all races and social classes who believed that communism offered a better future.

All that changed after the war ended. Suddenly international communism became the new menace, and anti-communist hysteria swept the nation. Lena Horne and lots of other liberal black activists got swept up in the hysteria.

Her name was on the blacklist. She tried to buy her way off with bribes, she even spoke out against the beliefs of her friend Paul Robeson who was an avowed communist and had very unwisely stated that if there were ever a war between the Soviet Union and America that most Negroes would not fight for the US. Nothing helped. She spent most of the first five years of the 1950s overseas, where foreign audiences loved her and racism was much less prominent.

TV was a salvation. The networks didn't like using blacklisted singers, but the producers who put on variety shows needed talent, and people like Ed Sullivan didn't care about politics; they cared about audience ratings. She made a number of TV appearances, did a modestly successful Broadway show, made record albums that were sometimes nominated for industry awards. Her 1957 live album "Lena Horne at the Waldorf-Astoria" became the best selling record by a female singer that RCA-Victor ever had. It is notable that this was a live album, while most of her studio work seemed more stiff, and those studio records seldom sold well.

But she was making lots and lots of money singing in nightclubs. The lure of very big money had also brought her to Vegas. She hated the racketeers who owned the big hotels, and she hated their racist policies, but by this time she was able to push back. The hotel owners needed big acts and hers was one of the biggest. She insisted on changes, and she got her way, with the help of her show business friends, but mainly with the help of Frank Sinatra, a fellow former MGM player that she didn't like and never got along with.

Battles with her first husband continued over the children, particularly about her son Teddy who had been in his father's custody. He was a brilliant student who became president of his high school class, and won a seven year scholarship to USC, the first black student to ever receive such honors. Instead Lena paid his way to attend a



prestigious university in France, where he became hooked on heroin and developed Hepatitis C, which led to liver failure, and eventually, complete dependency on dialysis for the remainder of what became a short life.

In the 1960s she became deeply involved in the exploding civil rights movement. During this entire decade she was increasingly under the influence of Jeanne Noble, a militant black feminist who helped to fan the flames of her anger into open hostility against all whites. Years of pent-up frustration and the belief that she was living a privileged life while most of the members of her race were facing oppression far more awful than anything she had endured caused her to seek out the more militant elements of the civil rights movement. She was tired of being the "Symbol" of the Negro race, forever up on a pedestal, always under scrutiny and with very little freedom to enjoy her own life.

In 1963 she accepted an invitation from Medgar Evers to appear at rallies in Jackson, Mississippi and was astonished at how well she was received by the ordinary black people of the city. She agreed to appear on a TV program to talk about the civil rights struggle a few days later, and while waiting to go on the air, learned that Evers had been murdered. Increasingly she came to identify with the people who wanted violent confrontation with the system, not Martin Luther King, but Malcolm X, whom she described as her hero. She came to view all white people, even her friends, as members of the oppressing class, and begin cutting off many of her long time white friends without a single word of explanation. When Malcolm X was assassinated she had a mini-breakdown and was unable to function for months.

The strain of it all overwhelmed her marriage. Some people said she took out her anger and frustrations on her husband. It was a 'if you love me so much, prove it' situation. No spouse could ever win that kind of game. Hayton was an easy going person who had willingly sacrificed his career to help mold and champion Lena's. When Lena screamed and complained he seldom spoke back, instead he most often reached for a martini. Finally Lena exploded and kicked Lennie Hayton out. He was exiled to their house in Palm Springs. She stayed in New York. They couldn't get a divorce; that would have been bad publicity for the civil rights cause they both ardently supported, so they permanently separated, making occasional public appearances together.

And she worked, a lot. She made an album of civil rights inspired music, "Here's Lena Now!", produced by Ray Ellis, her new lover, who was also a white man. She hated white people, but most often found herself in relationships with strong white men who could accept her as a woman instead of a nationally known show biz personality.

Sales of "Here's Lena Now!" were good. She spoke at rallies, she performed at benefits, she gave interviews in which she continued to rewrite her life's history, and she campaigned to get a TV show of her own. She did lots of appearances on other people's programs, but the networks wouldn't take a chance on a show with her, not even a special.

Finally she fled to England and made a deal with ATV to produce a Lena Horne TV special in return for a tour of their British night clubs. The British TV special was a smash hit, but in America the networks refused to air it. It was finally released in syndication, and in every market where it was shown it achieved enormous viewer ratings and the critics gave it rave reviews.

Television and night clubs became her mark on show business. She finally got her American TV special in 1969, after almost every other prominent black artist had preceded her. She made appearances on Sesame Street and the Muppet Show. She talked about retiring, lots of times. She even did a farewell tour in 1980, but retirement didn't come, ever. She did benefits, she made a few more record albums.

She did her own one woman shows. A four week engagement at New York's Nederlander Theater in 1981 stretched out to over a year. She won a Tony award, and two Grammys for that show. In 1984 a revue titled "A Lady and Her Music" toured the nation, and then the rest of the world, breaking all attendance records.

She was recording, and still crusading against prejudice into her eighties, still making the occasional TV appearance and always looking wonderful. Yet to the very end of the life she couldn't shake the low self esteem issues she had battled her entire life, and she could never seem to reconcile herself to the lifetime of bigotry that had shaped her personality. To the end of her life she had to prove herself. She kept working long past the time when most people would have retired on their laurels. She never thought she had earned any laurels. She had to prove herself again and again, to prove that she actually had talent, that she was not just a pretty face; that a black woman could overcome all the prejudice and hatred she had been exposed to all her life. She did. She won that battle hands down, but as Gavin makes clear, she never won the battle with herself.

This is one of the most depressing yet fascinating biographies I have ever read. It is also one of the most thoroughly researched. I recommend it highly.



# "Kay Kyser's Mystery Broadcast!"

by

*Robert Jennings*

Radio collectors are often interested in the many other forms of popular entertainment which overlap their own field. Indeed, in the twentieth century, the various types of popular culture have intertwining tendrils so complete that personalities or characters popular in one form of media seem almost inevitably to transfer over to other parts of the cultural landscape.

Books have become radio shows, radio shows have become movie series, movie stars got their own radio or TV series, while some radio and TV series even spawned their own magazines.

All time champions of multi-media involvement would have to include such timeless heroes as Sherlock Holmes and Tarzan, who went from novels and short stories to become plays, movies, radio programs, comic books, comic strips (both daily and Sunday), graphic novels, television shows, board games, interactive role playing adventures, and even video games.

Some characters came from other formats to radio. Blondie was a comic strip, then a series of movies, then a radio show, and then a TV show. Boston Blackie was a famous novel in 1912, adapted to two silent movies, then became a movie series for Columbia Pictures, then made it to radio and later, television.

The Green Lama was a short lived pulp magazine hero who enjoyed an even briefer run as a radio program. The Black Hood was primarily a comic book hero who starred in a few issues of a pulp magazine and a test run on the radio. Certainly the most famous character crossover between pulps and radio was The Shadow, who also had a long running comic book and a short run as a daily comic strip.

It was somewhat rarer but not unknown for radio shows to transfer into comic books or comic strips. Efforts to keep their pulse on what youngsters

and teenagers were interested in led many comic book companies to drop radio heroes onto the colored page.

The Lone Ranger, and Sgt Preston were among the best known and longest lasting radio to comic adaptations. Casey Crime Photographer had a five issue run from Marvel/Atlas comics. DC picked up hit crime radio programs Big Town and Mr. District Attorney with both enjoying very long runs in the comic field. Suspense had a short run connection with the comics and a shorter run as a digest fiction magazine. The Mysterious Traveler radio show produced seven excellent digest mystery magazine issues, and also spawned thirteen issues of a Charlton comic book which outlasted the radio series by several years.

Humorous radio shows also made the jump to the color pulp pages of comic books, some more successfully than others. Henry Aldrich had a twenty-two issue, five year run in the early 1950s from Dell, while My Friend Irma showed up on the Marvel/Atlas comic lists turning out forty-eight issues in its five year run. DC tried out A Date With Judy which ran thirteen long years, finally closing out in 1960.

However, with all of that said, it's not often that a popular radio personality became a guest-star in a major comic book story, and certainly not a major costumed hero comic book story. But there was one notable instance in which a radio personality, a genuine living human being, was cast as the guest star in a comic book. Indeed, he was teamed up with one of the most popular comic book heroes ever created. In 1949, with Detective Comic #144 Kay Kyser and his "Kollege of Musical Knowledge" radio program guest starred with Batman in that issue. This article will take a few minutes to talk about this event and its stars.

Kay Kyser, born James Kern Kyser on June 18, 1905 in Rocky Mound, NC had a long and distinguished musical career. One of six children, both of his parents were pharmacists. His mother was the



# BATMAN AND ROBIN!



# Detective COMICS

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FOR MENACE  
AND MUSIC  
TUNE IN NOW  
as  
BATMAN  
and ROBIN  
star with

IN  
"The MYSTERY  
BROADCAST"



first registered female pharmacist in the state, and the family had for generations been deeply involved with the University of North Carolina. With this background they were determined that all their children, including young James would become well educated.

In 1926 he was attending the University of North Carolina where he was primarily known for his exuberant style as a UNC cheerleader and as a producer of college plays. Hal Kemp, another UNC student, formed a college band and wanted Kyser to join. Jazz music appealed to Kyser, and he decided to take up the clarinet, but it quickly became apparent that showmanship was his true talent.

When Kemp graduated he persuaded Kyser to take over the college group while Kemp headed north for fame and musical fortune. After accepting the offer, Kyser decided to change his name to Kay Kyser to create a snappy stage presence. The band at this point had six members. A little later George Duning came aboard as the group's arranger/composer and was instrumental in creating the band's unique style. Many years later he would go on to score numerous Hollywood films.

After graduation Kay and the band headed for yankee territory and for awhile business for the band was good but not great. Then came 1929 and with the depression things were somewhat less than good. Merwyn Bogue (soon nicknamed Ish Kabibble by the other band members) joined the band in 1931 playing coronet. The group recorded some sides for RCA Victor that aroused no excitement and played a string of supper clubs and dance halls.

Hal Kemp was finishing up a long engagement at Chicago's Blackhawk Club and recommended the Kyser band to the owner. Kay Kyer settled in with a regular paying job that allowed him enough extra cash to hire Ginny Simms as the band's girl singer.

By 1935 success began to smile on the group and they got a recording contract with Brunswick Records, who released what was to become their theme song, "Thinking Of You," with vocals by "Smilin' Bill" Stoker.

Bill Stoker left the band shortly thereafter for greener pastures, just as the group was on the threshold of national success. Singer Harry Babbitt signed on in 1937 and the band mix was almost complete.

The concept of the "Kollege of Musical Knowledge" was born at the Blackhawk Club sometime in late 1937 as a way to liven up normally slow Monday nights. Originally it was called "Kay's Klass" and was essentially an amateur night, with Kay asking a few silly questions to loosen up nervous contestants.

This format proved to be very popular with the audience, and within a few months the Mutual

Broadcasting System had the band on the air for a weekly radio program broadcast regionally. When the regional show began to bump network offerings in that same time slot NBC took notice, and so did the American Tobacco Company, who were looking to expand their radio offerings to a new night of the week.

"Kay Kyser's Kollege of Musical Knowledge" with Kay as "the ole Professor of swing" hit the NBC airwaves on March 30, 1938 broadcast from New York City, with a mix of lively music, comedy, and tricky questions tossed at good natured contestants. Lucky Strike was the sponsor, and within two months the show had become one of the top twenty programs on the air and was still climbing rapidly.

Kyser worked on the principle that if he and the band weren't having fun, then the audience couldn't either. The show opened with the band's theme song, and Kay's greeting in his rich southern accent "Evenin' folks, how Y'all?" Kay was dressed in a flat mortar board style college hat with flowing college gown. The band members often appeared in costume as well, wearing beanies and college letter sweaters. When the members aligned properly the letters would spell out the sponsor's name. The band singers were introduced as "the faculty".

A lively instrumental usually started things off, followed by some comedy, then a song featuring one or both of the regular lead singers, and then the first contestant came to the mike for his moment of fame. The questions asked could range from easy and obvious to obscure and incredibly difficult. Contestants could win up to \$400 in the quiz. Most of the questions were submitted by listeners at home, who were mailed a special "Kollege Diploma" if their questions were used on the air. Questions in the music field, particularly popular swing music were the most frequently used. When a contestant flubbed an easy one Kyser would call out to the audience for the correct answer with the cry of "I'm so sorry! Stoodents?" and the audience would roar out the answer.

The questions involving a true and false format were even more popular. These usually centered around facets of popular swing music, the jargon of the hepcats, popular music personalities, songs, and musical titles. Kay adopted a snappy formula for this including such comments as "that's right, it's wrong!" or "that's wrong, you're right!"

Questions from the middle and latter period of the show involved Kay or some member of the cast reading an informative paragraph about some familiar object or event, such as babies or the common housecat. The statement would contain many facts, some obscure, but would also contain some errors. The contestant would be asked to name as many errors as he could.



# Kay Kyser's College of Musical Knowledge



*has satisfactorily completed the prescribed Course in  
Musical Knowledge  
and is hereby declared a Graduate and is awarded this*

## Diploma

*In witness whereof we have hereunto set our hands and seal*

KAY KYSER'S COLLEGE OF MUSICAL KNOWLEDGE  
WGN-TV, CHICAGO  
1941-1954

*Kay Kyser*  
MUSIC MASTERS

There was plenty of music and corny comedy in-between and the mix was a solid hit with the listeners. Kyser closed out most broadcasts with a shouted instruction to "Common chillun', Yet's dance!"

With a rich smooth tenor, "smooth as buttah" Kyser liked to say, Harry Babbitt was the lead male singer. He also possessed the ability to do very high voices, great for the novelty numbers the band loved to create. He provided the whacky laugh for "The Woody Woodpecker Song." After he left the Kyser radio show he did the little kid voice on "All I Want For Christmas Is My Two Front Teeth" and went on to become a personality in early television performing with Steve Allen and as a regular on "Bandstand Review". He officially retired from music in 1964, but continued singing off and on for decades, finally passing away at the age of 90 in April of 2004.

Singer Ginny Simms added a touch of class to a program noted for folksy humor and a down home neighborly feeling. She was born in San Antonio Texas with an angelic voice that was extremely adaptable. Her duets with Harry Babbitt were jazz perfection. She stayed with the band for seven years and three movies before deciding to go out on her own in late 1941. She had several popular radio shows and was featured in eight other movies, however the music business is notoriously fickle. She left the entertainment field in the mid 1950s, eventually went into real estate, and lived quietly until her death in 1994.

Much of the corny comedy for the show was provided by Ish Kabibble, real name Merwyn Bogue, who grew up in Erie, PA and played coronet. He liked the older traditional style jazz, but could play anything. The name "Ish Kabibble" apparently came from a Yiddish comedy song "Isch Ga Bibble" which translates more or less into "I should worry?" The public loved his comedy rendition of the song long before the band hit the airwaves. He refined the character by cutting his hair in a bowl style with bangs, and studying up on puns and ridiculous riddles. He would constantly interrupt Kay right in the middle of a number, to Kyser's feigned on-air frustration, reciting nonsensical poems and injecting corny word play. Offstage he was no dummy; he handled the payroll for the band. He stuck with Kyser right up to the very end, then went off on his own. He sold real estate, but his real love was traditional New Orleans jazz. His Dixieland band "The Shy Guys" played Las Vegas regularly. His sister published a biography of him in 1989. He died in 1994 shortly after Ginny Simms.

Sully Mason "sassy Sully," as Kay called him, was one of the original six members of the Kyser band, playing alto Sax. He also sang rhythm and did scat-style songs and was especially strong on the many novelty numbers the band produced. He was often a comedy foil for Kay or Ish on the program. Behind the scenes he and Kyser band manager Lew Wasserman are often unofficially credited with helping to create and

smooth out the entire concept of the Kollege of Musical Knowledge format. After the band broke up he did some fill-in and studio work but remained largely out of the public eye. He died in the 1970s.

The King Sisters (Louise, Donna, Alyce and Yvonne) joined the band in 1944, providing harmony vocals and backgrounds for a wide variety of songs. They originally hailed from Salt Lake City, UT, and took their stage name from their father, vocal coach Daddy King Diggs. They started out with their mother and a friend as the six King Sisters, performing with Horace Heidt for three years beginning in 1935. By 1939 the group had shrunk to four, and they were with Alvino Rey, Louise's husband. They had a long series of popular record hits under their belts when Rey disbanded his orchestra and joined the military after the war started, approving the King Sisters link-up with the Kyser band. The King Sisters were with Kay Kyser till after the war ended. The King Sisters and Rey performed together thru the 1950s but attracted very little attention. Eventually they added other family members to their singing group, evolved into The King Family, and were more than ready when ABC offered them a television show in 1965 that ran for four years. They did specials and guest TV appearances up thru the early 1980s.

There were many other band members, all very talented musicians who loved the music and stuck with the band for most of its existence. Many of them such as Roc Hillman, Herman "Heinie" Gunkler, Bobby Guy, Jack Barrow, and Lyman Gandee sang vocals on the songs and even helped compose them.

A lot of band members went into the service in World War Two, but most returned to the group after the hostilities ended. When big bands fell out of favor in the early fifties some stayed with music, but many got 'civilian' jobs, playing the music they loved only occasionally. Some are still alive as of the time this is being written.

The show continued to gain popularity and momentum thru 1939, with ratings placing it as one of the top ten radio programs on the air. The show was a full hour of upbeat happy music, comedy skits full of puns and word play, and lively questions that were a hit with studio audiences and millions of listeners at home.

Meanwhile the band was turning out hit records by the dozens, literally. Between 1938 and 1948 over thirty-five of their records hit the top ten charts, and eleven of their songs reached the number one spot. Many of their number one tunes such as "Three Little Fishes" staying at the top of the charts for months at a time.

One of their number one songs "Praise the Lord and pass the Ammunition" had unexpected results. The

Japanese military command heard about the song and declared that American chaplains would no longer be considered non-combatants in the war. Protests by America POWs, the Red Cross and diplomatic efforts thru the Swiss Embassy were to no avail.

The "Ripley's Believe It Or Not!" newspaper panel ran a picture of Kay Kyser, declaring him the most popular band leader in America despite that fact that he couldn't play a musical instrument, couldn't sing, and couldn't even read music. This was exaggerating things a bit. Kyser carried the clarinet around on stage, and occasionally he pressed it to his lips as the orchestra played, but his mastery with the instrument was in doubt even back in his college days. If he sang only when the rest of the band was vocalizing, he more than made up for it with his lively on-stage dance antics.

The Kyser band was especially noted for its long string of novelty songs. Others in the business, particularly those who wanted swing and jazz to become more legitimate in the eyes of musicologists tended to look down on these types as pure commercialism, but the songs were very popular with the listening public, who, in the end, bought the records and the sheet music, as well as the tickets to the dance concerts, and their purchases drove the music industry. Modern students of jazz are now finally willing to concede that doing novelty numbers took as much and sometimes more playing talent as straight love songs or dance numbers. Kyser never apologized for any song he was associated with, and his endless string of chart hits proved the public agreed with his musical assessment.

It didn't much matter to Kyser. In 1940 alone he was heard by over twenty million listeners every week and he was personally earning a million dollars a year for his efforts.

With popular success like that it was only a matter of time before Hollywood came calling. RKO turned out the first of what were to be seven feature length Kay Kyser films, all loosely based on the band, with lots and lots of singing and music, plenty of corny comedy skits and almost nothing in the way of plot.

The first one "That's Right, It's Wrong" starred Lucille Ball and Adolph Menjou. The second film "You'll Find Out" hit theaters in 1940 and boasted Boris Karloff, Bela Lugosi and Peter Lorre as co-stars, the first and only time all three appeared together on film. The three followed up with an appearance on the Kyser radio show after the movie's premiere.

Kay Kyser and his band also appeared in "Stage Door Canteen" as well as "Thousands Cheer" with many other show business personalities and did a lot of musical and interview shorts, many of which collectors

have not been able to fully identified at this point in time.

The other Kay Kyser feature films include "Playmates" (1941) John Barrymore's last movie, "My Favorite Spy" (1942) *not* the Bob Hope film of the same title, and "Around the World" (1943). With "Swing Fever" (1943) Kyser moved from RKO to MGM in a movie which features an unusually weak and sappy story, even for a Kyser flick. In 1944 Columbia picked them up for "Carolina Blues" which presented an almost logical plot. By far this last movie was the strongest in a series of fluff-on-film that served primarily to let the public who could never attend one of the radio shows see the band and its members close up. A rumor that another post war film was planned by Columbia has never been substantiated.

When World War II hit in 1941 the band was at the top of their popularity. Almost immediately Kyser volunteered his entire orchestra to perform for military personal in training and staging camps. He was the very first big name performer to go this route. Thruout the entire war he and the band performed almost continuously for service personnel. He was also instrumental in getting the Hollywood Canteen started. In September of 1943 the Hollywood Cavalcade War Bond Tour began. This was a grand slam tour that criss-crossed the country by train playing military camps and raising millions of dollars for war bonds.

The show featured dozens of top movie stars in a show with Kyser as the MC and the band backing up the Hollywood singing stars.

In 1942 his touring band bus caught on fire and almost all of his band arrangements, fifteen year's worth, were burned to ashes. As dire as that disaster was, in reality it turned out to be a blessing in disguise, because the band immediately began to update and freshen their musical style. At this point Kyser declared that he would accept no new band engagements beyond his radio show and movies, that he and the band would devote all their time to playing for military personnel until the war ended.

A fair number of band members were drafted or volunteered for the war effort, including his lead male singer Harry Babbitt. A new young singer named Mike Douglas stepped in to take over the slot handling lead on such hits as "Ol' Buttermilk Sky" and "The Old Lamplighter". Douglas always credited Kyser not only for giving him his first real start in show business, but also for convincing him to change his name from Michael Dowd to Mike Douglas. When Kay Kyser and Ish Kabibble took an extended tour of the Pacific war theater Phil Harris subbed for him on his radio show.

Ginny Simms left the band in the fall of 1941. Kyser immediately hired Trudy Erwin as her replacement, followed a year or so later by Julie Conway, then Gloria Wood, and Lucy Ann Polk.



Kay Kyser and his new wife in a publicity photo, Las Vegas, June 9<sup>th</sup>, 1944



Publicity photo of Kay and Georgia on the set of the movie "Carolina Blues"



In 1943 a new girl singer named Georgia Carroll came on board. "Gorgeous Georgia" Kay called her. She had been a prominent fashion model and a movie star with Warner Brothers before joining the band. Sent by Warner Brothers to help with the Kyser band camp shows, he discovered that she could sing as well. Kay liked her singing style a lot. In fact he liked everything about her. They hit it off so well that on June 8<sup>th</sup>, 1944 they got married.

The birth of their baby girl, the first of three, caused Georgia's retirement from the show. Several other female singers followed her, including Jane Russell, who went on to star in a long string of hit movies shortly thereafter.

Somewhere during all this touring Kyser began to have trouble with his feet and knees. He was developing arthritis. He sought medical help, but nothing seemed to help. Being in pain much of the time had a limiting effect on his enthusiasm for touring, but he never slowed down when it came to performing for service people. By the end of the war he was talking about retiring, but he had contacts that prevented it.

He also began to become seriously interested in Christian Science. It seemed to be the only thing that helped the pain caused by his arthritis.

Christian Science as a religion and a philosophy of living is in decline these days. However in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it was a very popular sub group of the Christian community.

Founded in 1879 by Mary Baker Eddy, the essentials of the movement were that God is the loving creator of all, and that God can provide not just spiritual help in giving meaning and stability to your life, but he can also provide physical healing for illness.

Many references in the New Testament clearly show that not only did Jesus cure the sick, but that his disciples and followers were also able to cure illness and deformity thru the power of God. That power, according to Eddy, never went away, it is there for anyone who truly believes and can be used to cure ailments in your own body.

Her concept was that illness is at base a mental delusion which can be cured thru a clearer perception of God and God's benevolent powers. True belief in the power of a loving God thru Jesus is essential to receiving these blessings. Refocusing and purifying the human spirit thru God's teaching will eliminate the illusions and sin within the human spirit, with illness being expelled as a result.

She also believed that the physical world as we know it is essentially a spiritual illusion, and that by bringing ourselves closer to God thru Jesus and the Holy Spirit, the evils and fears of the world which disturb and distract us can be overcome and placed into

proper perspective. Students of Philosophy will recognize many of the teachings and beliefs of Plato echoed here.

The religion grew by leaps and bounds in the first fifty years of the twentieth century. The Christian Science Monitor was established in 1908 by Ms Eddy as a national, completely independent daily newspaper, and went on to win numerous journalistic awards for its unbiased clarity and dedication to open, honest news reporting. Christian Science reading rooms were established in most major cities and many smaller ones, open to the public and always stocked with copies of the Monitor and Christian Science literature as well as other kinds of popular reading material. They had a syndicated television program during the 1950s that was aired extensively across the country, possibly owing to the fact that the group did not charge stations for its use.

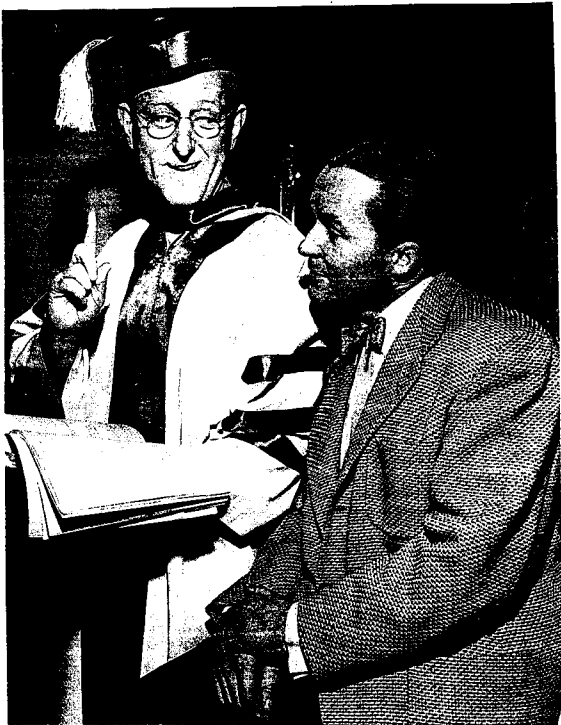
The group's decline began in the 1960s, due to a number of factors. Skeptics will say that the rapid advances in medical knowledge and treatment spurred by WWII was the deciding element, and there is truth in that. However, some of the tenets of the society itself may have been more telling. For example, Mary Baker Eddy in several of her books made it clear that she did not approve of sexual relations. Sex was to be used strictly for the procreation of the species, and was otherwise something from which her followers should abstain.

In this her views are radically different from most religions past or present, which view sexual pleasure as a direct gift of the gods, given to the human race as an aid to procreation and best enjoyed within the bonds of holy matrimony.

Your average person tends to view the concept of marriage without sex as bizarre, and a religion which wants to eliminate or severely restrict sex within marriage is going to have many doubters. This became particularly clear beginning in the 1960s and onward, where sexual openness became more socially acceptable.

Kay Kyser and his wife became deeply involved in the Christian Science church. In addition he also increased his efforts for philanthropic projects.

Ashamed and alarmed by how many people from his home state had been rejected for military service as physically unfit during the war, he did considerable work to establish the North Carolina Good Health Campaign. He devoted his entire summer in 1946 working within the state, and got some of his Hollywood friends to help out. Frank Sinatra and Dinah Shore sang on the "It's All Up To You" record to promote the charity which worked to establish hospitals and clinics thruout the state and developed a wide ranging public health program.



Publicity shot with Mike Douglas for the 1950 television show

He worked extensively during 1947 to help build a new wing for the St. Jude's Children's Hospital in Santa Monica, CA. He raised one million dollars in donations with a single celebrity studded 'Circus Of The Stars' performance in Hollywood. In recognition of his efforts his portrait hangs at the entrance of the hospital medical library.

In 1946 the radio show was cut back to thirty minutes with Kyser's approval. Colgate had taken over as the sponsor in 1944 and stayed with the program up thru most of 1948.

1948 was a pivotal year for the orchestra. They had four songs in the top twenty, with "The Woody Woodpecker Song" hitting number one and "On a Slow Boat to China" going to number two in its twenty weeks on the charts. But that was the last year the band was to have any big song hits.

In the spring of 1948 Kyser parted company with both NBC and Colgate. His ratings had faltered after the end of the war. The music business was changing. Big band swing had been on top for more than a decade, but a new generation was interested in other music styles such as jump jive, be-bop, and rhythm & blues.

Much of mainstream jazz seemed to be preoccupied with sultry torch songs backed by small combos and improvisational instrumentals. Jazz

orchestra music was being reshaped in the Stan Kenton and Stan Gitz image

Kyser switched to ABC in November of 1948, but not with a prime time program. Now he was on with a thirty minute, five days a week format airing at eleven in the mornings with Pillsbury as the sponsor. In January the time slot changed to four in the afternoon. This format ran thru the end of July 1949. At the end of the run Harry Babbitt left the band to star in his own weekday CBS song book show.

By 1949 Kyser was much more interested in religion and charity than big band music. At this point he decided it was time to cancel his radio show after eleven years of broadcasting. Big bands were having an increasingly difficult time finding playing engagements. His daytime rating numbers were good, but erratic. An era was ending, but NBC prevailed on him to come back home and do his original full hour-long show format again, but this time do it on television.

The show moved over to television in the fall of 1949 with no difficulties. Ford Motors was on board as the national sponsor. Mike Douglas was signed as the lead singer. Other notables included Sue Bennett, Diane Sinclair, and Kenney Spaulding. Perry Lafferty was the producer and Carl Hoff, listed as the "Dean Of Music", was the actual orchestra leader.

The TV program seemed as popular as ever, but it was abruptly cancelled in 1950 right in the middle of the second season. The word circulated thru the industry that Mrs. Ford hated the corny comedy and considered it beneath the dignity of a company like Ford Motors, but ratings may have been the actual contributing factor.

A few years later, in 1954, Tennessee Ernie Ford was hired for a rebuilt replacement without Kay Kyser. This new program eliminated most of the features that had made the Kyser formula so popular. Now titled "The College of Musical Knowledge", it featured almost no humor and almost nothing but music. This version ran as a summer replacement show, but was not picked up for the fall season.

Kyser was not particularly upset. The cancellation provided him the perfect opportunity to retire. So he quit. But he quit without fanfare or even announcements. He quit cold. He granted no interviews, answered no fan mail, refused contact with the press, turned down all offers for guest spots or even photos and retired to North Carolina with his wife to devote his life to raising a family, working for his church and performing local charity work.

His legions of fans were hurt and upset, but Kyser cut himself off completely from his old life. He even refused to go into the recording studio to work with the band on a 1951 hi-fi LP album of their greatest

hits. In 1952 a wire press photo and short news story about the birth of his third daughter (reprinted below) was virtually the only information or image the national public saw of him for the next twenty years.

His involvement with the TV show, especially viewing the unique Ford commercials developed by UNC professor Roy K Marshall, convinced him that television could become a powerful educational and communication tool. He became one of the four primary supporters instrumental in establishing a public television system in North Carolina, and was also directly involved in the expansion of the television and electronic arts studies at UNC.

When confusion as to how best to equip and operate a public television service thru the university threatened to swamp the project, Kyser called up NBC president David Sarnoff and asked him to become personally involved in getting the project moving. Between the two they obtained donated equipment as well as expert technical help and North Carolina established one of the earliest and most effective public television services in the nation.

His involvement with the Christian Science Church became much deeper. He worked directly with the Boston headquarters running their TV and film departments in the 1970s. By the late 70's and early 80s he was a Christian Science teacher and public affairs speaker, traveling an extensive lecture circuit. In this capacity he would grant interviews with radio and TV stations and talk about his big band days in return for plugs for his lectures.

In 1983 he was elected President of the Worldwide Church of Christian Science. He died of heart failure in his office at Chapel Hill on July 23, 1985 just a month beyond his 80<sup>th</sup> birthday. To the very end he considered his family, his work with his church and his charity work as the only important events of his life.

His long time lead singer Harry Babbitt bought the band's catalog from Kyser's widow and toured up thru the mid 1990s under the Kay Kyser banner, one of the very last of the touring remnants of the big band era.

Jay Hickerson's invaluable "Guide to Old Time Radio Shows in Circulation" reports that there are a



grand total of 20 Kay Kyser shows in circulation in the hobby. Think about it, only 20 shows for an eleven year radio run. And frankly, I'd like to know where even those 20 shows are.

As a member of one of the oldest continuously existent radio clubs in the nation with thousands of hours of old time radio shows in our library, this club has only seventeen Kay Kyser programs in its files, and most of those are cut down abbreviated 25 minute Armed Forces Radio programs from the latter days of the run. Most dealer catalogs list few or none. Our current MP3 supplier claims to have 10 in his entire listings. Where are the rest of those 20 programs?

In fact, where are the rest of eleven years worth of Kay Kyser radio shows? Transcription copies were cut on almost all of them, not just for Armed Forces Radio, but also for sponsors, their ad agencies, for the NBC network (who hoarded everything for generations) and for the FCC. Where are those shows? Anybody got any clues? How about some help locating the vault and letting these wonderful programs out so the world can hear them again.

If there are precious few of the radio programs still in existence, there is an extensive catalog of Kay Kyser band songs, hundreds of them, which have been continuously reissued thru the years and which are available now from any good music store or from dozens of internet sellers.

In addition there is that bizarre incident in the history and chronology of the band, Kay Kyser's appearance in a Batman comic book story. The cover of Detective Comics #144, Feb 1949, shows Batman and Robin with Kay Kyser on the stage of his radio show with a thug in the audience firing a pistol at Batman. "For Menace and Music tune in NOW as Batman and Robin star with Kay Kyser in 'The Mystery Broadcast'" screams the promo logo.

The first mystery is what the actual title of the story was. Inside, the splash page scene, essentially the same illo as the cover, uses the title "Kay Kyser's Mystery Broadcast!"

I know that many of those reading this may not be deeply involved comic book collectors, at least not so deeply involved that you are willing to drop two hundred bucks or more to purchase this particular out-of-print rarity, so I hope you will forgive me if I retell the adventure here.

Batman and Robin are hot on the trail of Big Jack Bancroft, public enemy number one. Bancroft has shot his way thru a police cordon and hidden loot from his recent daring robbery. But the heat is on and he needs a safe place to lie low. Kay Kyser is bringing his band and radio show to Gotham City in a series of charity and publicity events. Bancroft hijacks the

passing car carrying Kyser and his passenger, a band member named Eddie Blinn, just barely escaping a close trailing Batman.

Bancroft notices that he and Blinn bear more than a superficial resemblance. He decides to play a brazen bluff. "I once fooled around with the sax in the prison band," he thinks. He has Kyser drive to one of Bancroft's hideaways at gunpoint, where a member of his gang holds Eddie Blinn prisoner. Bancroft declares he will take Blinn's place in the Kyser band, and if Kyser tries to give him away, Blinn will be murdered. "A little make-up and I'm all set! Just think—police looking for me everywhere except the one place they'd never think to look—in the spotlight with Kay Kyser!"

Kyser is in a desperate situation. Bancroft watches him like a hawk, but Gotham City is the home of Batman, the world's greatest detective, so he tries a risky scheme to attract attention. By slightly altering the laughs in "The Woody Woodpecker Song" and dedicating each rendition to 'Mr. Morse' he attracts the attention of the dynamic duo.

"I've got it!" says Batman after recording the new version off the air and diagramming the new laugh combo on a chalkboard. "I thought those insistent references to Mr. Morse had something to do with the Morse Code! Kyser has been sending an S.O.S!"

Batman arranges to become a contestant on the next Kyser concert. To all appearances this a publicity stunt to aid the fund raiser. Meanwhile Bancroft hears a news broadcast that the old city planetarium, where he hid his loot, will be remodeled beginning immediately. Bancroft telephones one of his buddies that he can trust. He tells Kyser that his pal will be a contestant on the show that night, and that win or lose Kyser will give the guy an envelope as a 'special surprise gift'. Inside are instructions telling where the loot is hidden and where to move it.

Kyser is up for the situation. When Bancroft's thug appears as a contestant he calls for another contestant to play against him in the true and false quiz. "That's my cue!" thinks Batman, "Kyser never pits one contestant against another like that!"

The true or false quiz turns out to be about hep-cat swing musical terminology and expressions, about which Batman knows almost nothing. Luckily Robin, stationed at the back of the auditorium, does. Using his belt radio he feeds Batman the answers to questions such as "In musical slang a flush-pump is a broken down drummer—true or false" "wrong" whispers Robin, "it's a trombone".

Bancroft's thug misses a question, so Kyser gives the envelope to Batman, but Bancroft has skipped out. Kyser rapidly fills in Batman on the kidnap situation and Batman decides to head for the



planetarium to prevent Bancroft escaping with the loot. Robin is dispatched to rescue Blinn.

Batman and Kyser rush to the planetarium where Bancroft is spotted on the roof of the building. Batman pounds Bancroft into submission against a backdrop of possible end of the world film footage in the background and appropriate 1940s style comic book wisecracks for dialog.

But alas, things go astray. Kyser, inexplicitly carrying his clarinet with him, has followed, jars the projector which causes the film to run wild, and in the confusion whacks Batman on the head by accident. Bancroft seizes the opportunity to gain the upper hand. He tosses Batman and Kyser into an airtight chamber after chaining them to heavy weights.

Once he shuts the door, he will turn on lethal gas which pores from a tube in the ceiling and both will die. "It'll all be over in a few minutes" he sneers. "Here's a clarinet pally! Go ahead and play a funeral march! Me—I'm getting on the first plane to Mexico!"

After tossing in the clarinet, the door slams, the gas is turned on and things look bad. Kyser notices there are blobs of putty on the floor, evidentially used to make the room completely air tight. He hastily strips down the clarinet as Batman looks on in amazement. The black core now resembles a blow pipe. Kyser jams a wad of putty into the end, takes aim and fires the putty into the gas tube sealing it off and saving the pair so Batman can radio Robin to release them. "This is nothin'!" Says Kyser. "You should have seen me handle a putty blower as a kid in Carolina!"

The police nab Big Jack as the plane is about to take off. The loot is recovered, and the final panel shows Batman and Robin on stage with Kay Kyser and

his band as Kyser dedicates the broadcast to Batman and Robin. The End.

Well. Great literature it ain't. In fact, it wasn't even a great Batman story. Many of the story points here clearly forced to jam Kay Kyser and his radio show into the confines of a crime adventure plot.

After finishing the story readers might wonder, for example, about that convenient wad of putty on the floor of this air tight chamber, which, also amazingly enough, seems to have this ready-made lethal gas tube in the ceiling, which Big Jack just happens to know about. And how did Big Jack manage to get Kyser's clarinet which he luckily tosses into the death chamber? It was also amazing to me that the old planetarium just happened to have chains and shackles laying around. I guess there are lots of things about the astronomy field I never knew.

Going farther back, if Big Jack Bancroft was able to telephone his gang pal to appear on the stage show that night, why didn't he just take a couple of seconds to tell him to rush over to the roof of the planetarium and pick up the money, avoiding all this convoluted quiz-show-secret-envelop-instructions stuff in the first place. The bit with the extra laughs in the Woody Woodpecker song as an SOS was also pretty weak.

Still, what do you want? Clearly the writer, not credited, and the artists, also not credited, were trying to work in the familiar Kay Kyser background and somehow jam it into a Batman crime adventure. Perhaps with more time and more background development the story could have been plotted more coherently, but it moves right along, it's entertaining,

and it displays strong character parts for both Kay Kyser and for Batman.

My questions, for years, have yet to be answered. I would like to know how, exactly, Kay Kyser came to be worked into a Batman comic book adventure. Obviously this had to be something that was approved in advance with Kay Kyser and his manager, but how this was arranged, and more important, why this was arranged has never been explained. I'd also like to know who the writer for this story was. The art looks mostly like the work of Winslow Mortimer on pencils and Charles Paris on inks, but I could well be mistaken.

Back a few years ago when I was producing THE COMIC WORLD and THE FOUR COLOR FLASH in the world of comic fandom, I asked various people at DC Comics for information on this story. I got some half-hearted promises, but I never got any answers.

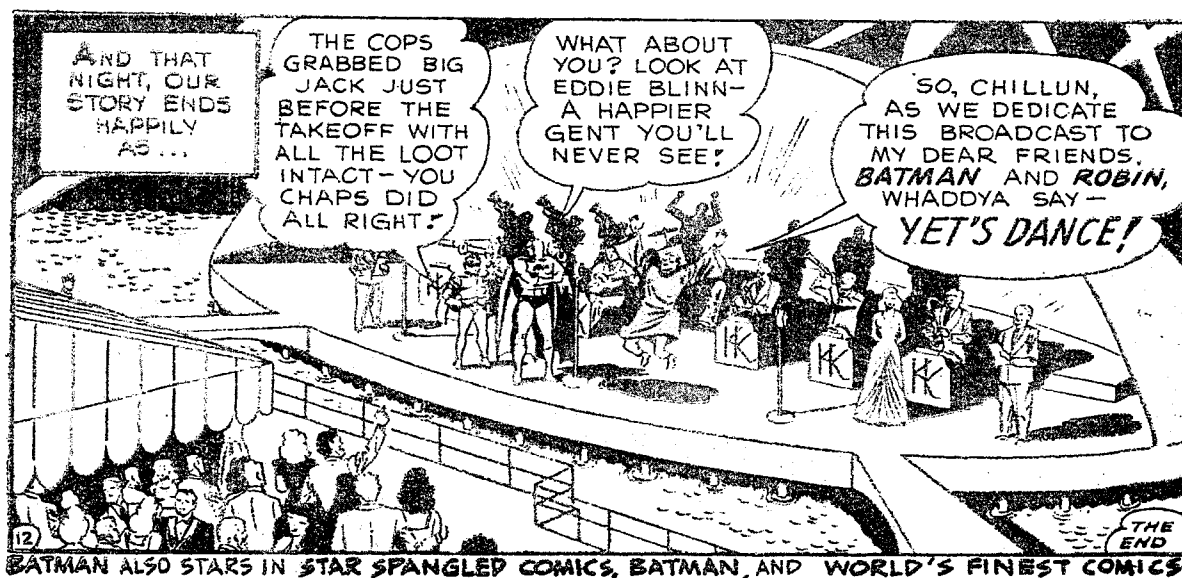
My last request was made in 1990 to Paul Levitz, long time comic book fan who joined DC and rose thru the ranks to become president of the company. He wrote that he would look into the situation and get back to me.

And a mere sixteen years later, after I sent him a copy of this article, he did get back to me, but he had no additional information to clear up this sixty-two year old mystery.

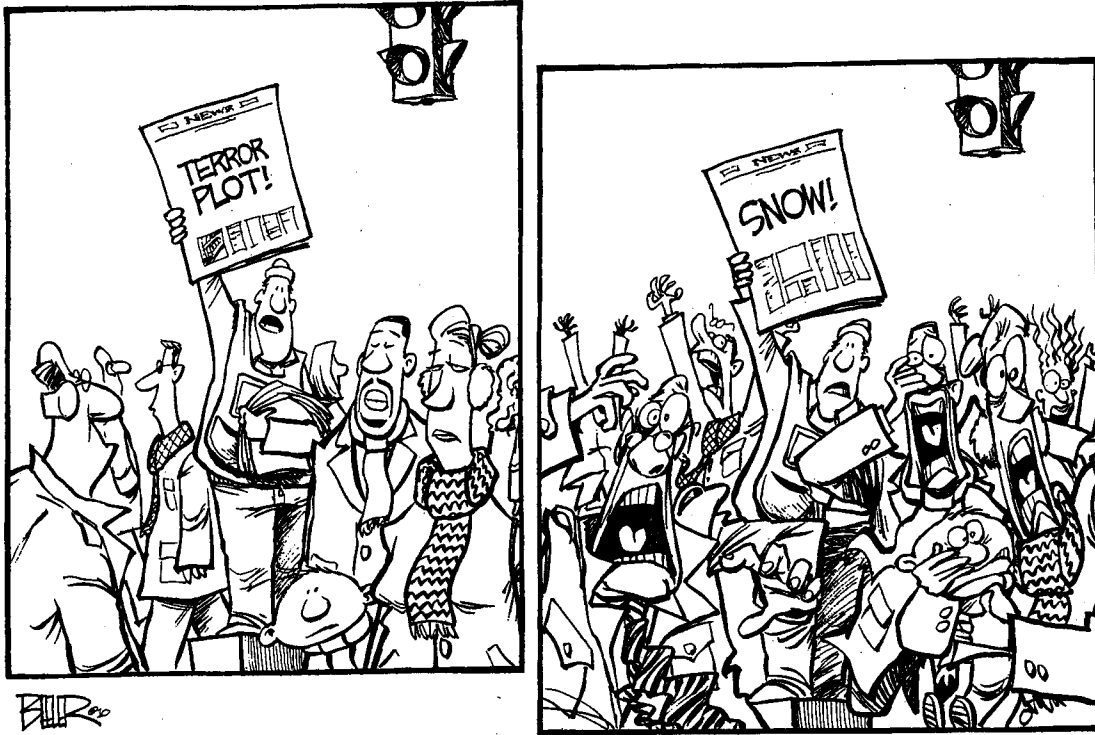
Batman never had another music-radio connection, altho five issues later, with Detective Comics #149, the Joker, Batman's long time arch enemy, did use radio inspired sound effects to commit a series of daring robberies. One wonders what might have happened if Kay Kyser had become a regular DC comic, or what might have happened if DC had decided to use other radio personalities in comic book crossover adventures. Cross promotion usually benefits both parties, and something exciting and interesting might have developed, but, none of these things did happen. This story remains a bizarre example of a radio-music-costumed hero hybrid that was not revisited by DC Comics.

Batman still lives on, as popular as ever, and the legacy of Kay Kyser lives on thru his band's huge musical catalog of hit songs. The Kay Kyser films play the old movie cable television channels regularly, but except for "Stage Door Canteen", few have been released commercially. Plenty of pirate copies can be found on ebay or thru film collector magazines, with the most desirable title being "You'll Find Out" with Karloff, Lugosi and Lorre

I just wish there were more of the actual radio shows available so we could listen today to what was one of the all time most popular variety music programs every broadcast. Maybe we should ask Batman to investigate leads to those lost transcriptions. I can't seem to find any clues



# READER REACTION



Joseph T. Major; 1409 Christy Ave.; Lexington, KY 40204-2040

I think that the problem with internet communication is that they lack the feedback of conversation, while not having the reflection time of physical mail communication. From thalamus to web, just like that! And to be honest, some of the less than even tempered types of fans were early adaptors, and as the first-ins, they set the standards

The on-line faned I've particularly noticed is Chris Garcia. Sometimes I think he's using up all the fan editor energy out there. (Jokes about his producing an issue of *The Drink Tanks* during a panel on fanzines, for example.) Where are the other on-line faneds?

A few years ago I was on a convention panel about fanzines with Tim Bolgeo and Guy Lillian. It quickly developed into a loud discussion between them over whether or not a fanzine should be purely email. Tim produces a sort of whatever-drew-his-interest mass emailing on a weekly basis, and I suppose you could call it a fanzine. It's certainly more like a fanzine that *Electric Velcpidede* or *StarShipSoda*. But he was hard-line and loud. I barely got a word in edgewise.

//I would regard a weekly emailing covering personal comments about whatever comes to the mailer's mind more like a personal blog than a fanzine. In these electronic times there is a blurring of formats. As a doddering old Geezer I prefer fanzines printed on paper in real ink, not pixels dancing on a computer screen.//

**Bill Schelly; PO Box 27471; Seattle, WA 98165-2471**

As the biographer of Otto Binder (*Words of Wonder*, sold out long ago), I should remember some interesting things about Mighty Samson, but – it really was an atrocious comic book. I do recall that Binder's name for the character was "Second Sampson" but the publisher came up with the one they used, and it's better. At this stage in Otto's writing career, his best days were behind him. He had lost his zest for writing, but had to continue doing it to support himself and his wife and daughter. Then his daughter was hit by a car and killed, his wife went crazy and had to be institutionalized, and Otto became a full blown alcoholic. Not a life that ended well.... But, when I think of Otto, I choose to remember his writing on Adam Link, his wonderful Marvel Family scripts, and his work on the Superman characters from 1954 to 1959. Not the dreadful *Mighty Samson*.

Why in the world is Dark Horse reprinting that junk? They also reprinted the ACG heroes, which were pretty bad too. Some of the later *Boris Karloff Tales of Mystery*, I think from Vol. 3 on, have very nice artwork by Alden McWilliams and George Evans. I guess Dark Horse must be able to make a profit on them even if the books sell under 1000 copies, because I can't imagine a Magicman volume selling more than that.

I agree, the amount of stupidity encountered in the world is just staggering – but, as with you, about the time I'm criticizing some one else, I'll do something equally or more stupid. Smart people (like you and me, of course) sometimes do stupid things. Then when you add in all the stupid things STUPID people do – it's everywhere! But stupidity is nowhere more depressingly evident than in politics. No, I'm not going into a political screed, because both major parties in our country are so off the beam. It's really hard to fathom, isn't it? But maybe it's not, if whatever's going on (or not going on) in Washington D.C. suits the big corporations.

Pet peeve: Corporate logos. For example, have you noticed how many corporate logos and names are shown at the beginning of any mainstream motion picture? It's United Artists brings you a Sony Classics presentation of a Legendary Film in association with Pretentious Media and Out the Window Productions, with the participation of Global Pictures .... ad nauseum!

I'm not a curmudgeon, or a Luddite. I just can't operate my television!!

///Thanks for your comments on Fadeaway #19. I managed to miss your book with the section on Otto Binder, so I appreciate your insights into Binder and his situation while he was turning out Mighty Sampson. Somebody once said if you wait long enuf everything turns out badly (probably the same guy who said nothing good lasts forever). Binder's tragic life at the end off his career undoubtedly also helps to explain those ridiculous "UFOs/occult occurrences are All True" paperbacks published under his name. Obviously he was in need of money and was no longer picky about what he had to write to get some cash.

Sometimes, very often in fact, I have great difficulty understanding why Dark Horse publishes some of the things it does. Clearly the reprint rights to material like Mighty Samson, the ACG heroes, and that gang of Harvey Comics characters are cheap to come by, plus they gets to print the books from the original stats and the original color separations, which presumably cuts down on production costs. Some of those reprint archives are selling--- the Turok books are moving at every comic store I've had contact with. In fact, I'm buying some of that series myself, at least up until the reprints finally meet the point in my comic collection where I have a solid run. A couple of friends are buying the Roy Rogers and Tarzan reprints, so one is forced to conclude that there is *some* demand for almost anything that qualifies as an old comic book. Of course, as a card carrying Geezer its hard for me to realize that stuff I bought off the newsstands in the sixties is now considered classic comic material even if it is forty+ years old.

Still, how many people could possibly want Nemesis or Little Lotta? Especially at fifty bucks a volume?

I think the endless array of companies and organizations mentioned at the beginning of every modern movie represents the grim reality that cinema costs enormous amounts of money to make these days, so much that no one company seems able to come up with all the money up front to produce anything. They have to sell pieces of the production, like stock, with each company who chipped in getting at least a token mention at the opening credits of the film. Since the part of the public who actually buys theater tickets seems most impressed by big name stars and elaborate sets/special effects, the trend towards every more expensive movie productions is likely to continue.

I think it's even more strange (and possibly ominous) that corporations are paying money to have their products "placed" in potentially popular movies. It used to be kind of bizarre in a cute-and-funny-way that Coke would try to get cans of their soda into the hands of the hero or heroine of almost any movie with a story set in modern times, but we've gone way beyond that now, where corporate logos and placement for companies making



truly obscure things not intended for direct consumer purchase are paying money to get themselves positioned in films.

It's also a sign of the time that DVD sets of popular TV programs, guaranteed to be commercial free, are the fastest selling segment of the picture entertainment industry these days. Commercial overload is one of the reasons I listen to college and public radio FM stations almost exclusively these days, and seldom bother to turn on my TV.

Luckily there is still plenty of good stuff out there to read---new stuff and reprints of *Good* older material as well as the junk///

TO WHICH BILL THEN REPLIED---

While Otto exploited interest in UFO's in a series of books, he did come to definitely believe that they were real. Not at first, when he debunked them in some TV appearances he made around 1960 and 1961, but there were lots of sightings in the 60s and he was eventually persuaded that they exist.

I think it unlikely that Dark Horse is able to sell above 500 copies of some of those reprint books. I personally bought one of the Jesse Marsh Tarzan, but I don't need them all. I also got their Magnus reprints, and the Kubert Tarzan books of course. I could see a paperback reprint book of the "Best of ACG" or some such -- I'd go for that -- but only if cost no more than \$25-30, and consist of a selection of their best material. Anyway, many of Dark Horse's \$50 books, even if they are regularly discounted at Amazon to \$35, have got to be poor sellers. Are there even 250 people who would buy a Magicman or Nemesis book? Not that it's my problem.....

**Brad W Foster; PO Box 165246; Irving, TX 75016**

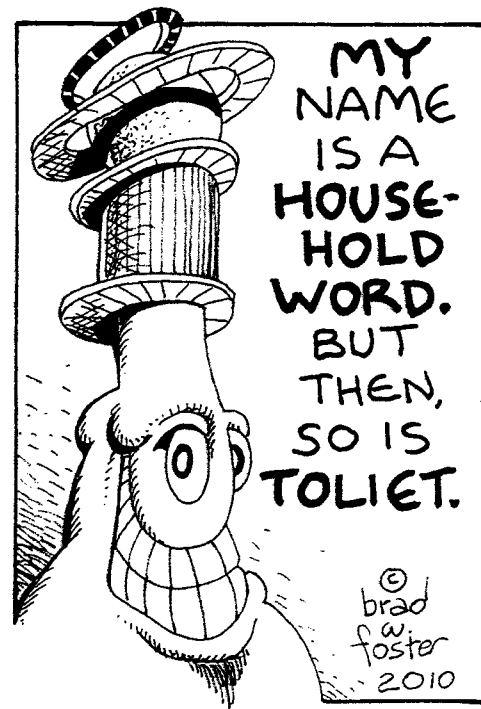
Got in FADEAWAY #19 a few days ago. Must have been some major screw-ups in the postal system to take this long, since you had noted that you put it in the mail near the end of October! Hope that doesn't happen with every issue. Feels odd knowing you have two pieces of art, but your publishing schedule is a couple months ahead... and now I get an issue a month late. It's like some kind of science fiction timewarp. Gosh-Wow!

Hey, don't feel so bad about the car mis-adventures. While it wasn't actually the key, reminded me of my own recent run in with a vehicle key. We were in Oklahoma City for an art festival, and while setting up at the show I snapped off my van key in the back door lock. I had a spare key, and we had unloaded everything, but I knew we would not be able to load back up at the end of the weekend if I couldn't open those back doors of the van, with the end of the key snapped off in them. We have AAA, and they got a locksmith to show up that evening. I was out there while he worked with a flashlight and a couple of tools for about twenty minutes fishing in the lock. He finally asks me if I'm sure I had broken it off in there. I said of course I was, and re-enacted how I'd walked around to the drivers door to open it... and when got there, he pointed out the bit of broken key sticking out of the lock on the drivers side door. sigh.

I'd forgotten all about the "Mighty Samson" comics. I was still in single-digit age when those came out, so I was impressed by anything new at that time. Probably a good idea not to revisit those things that impressed us when we were so small, usually don't hold up that well.

///Thanks for your LOC on Fadeaway #19. I'm a bit surprised the issue showed up so late, but things like that happen during the holiday season. As long as you eventually received the issue all is well.

Some comic books from the days of our youth are excellent and rereading them as an adult is always refreshing when something turns out to be just as great as you remember it was. However, as I keep saying, we tend to become more sophisticated as we age, and often the things that wowed us as a kid now show up as being pretty pitiful when they are read with adult eyes.



Mighty Sampson, as I mentioned in the article, was never a good comic. I remember reading it when it first came out and thinking the setup was interesting but the stories were crummy and the art was very ordinary. Age has only reinforced those opinions. The astonishing thing to me is that Dark Horse is reprinting this stuff. Of course they are also reprinting material like Magicman, Little Dot and a host of other eminently forgettable comic books. How much of a market can there be for third rate material that never sold that well when it was originally appearing on the stands, much less now, decades later? Or maybe Dark Horse is just counting on bogus nostalgia and bad memories. After all, I was dumb enough to buy the first volume of Mighty Samson. Using the logic that there is undoubtedly a sucker born every minute, maybe they are moving through enough of this trash to make it profitable.

**John Threl; 30 N. 18<sup>th</sup> Street; Lafayette, IN 47904**

I liked the art on the opening page of *Fadeaway* #19. It reminded me of earlier fanzine art by such artists as Charles Spidall and Dan Adkins.

The material by Robert Bloch was also of great interest. He had a lasting effect on science fiction, fantasy and fandom that people still haven't figured out.

I loved John Cody's cartoon portraying one of a book collector's worst moments very successfully. That is indeed a picture of a bottom event.

I've had the exact same automotive experience that you had. A car's electronic system will put any man into a homicidal state of mind. If there be any who can say he is perfectly adapted to his car's automatic systems, let me speak up now that he may be known.

///And I'll bet he would be a pretty lonely guy too. I don't know anybody who has a full command of their automobile systems. I used to drive a cargo van, drove one for several decades. When I got that Ford Fusion it was like I was stepping into some kind of super futuristic rocket ship. The car came with an instruction book as big as a pocket college dictionary. I still haven't figured out what everything is supposed to do.///

**Jeff Allen; 267 Belmont St.; Worcester, MA 01604**

Received *Fadeaway* #19; great issue! The article about Francis Stevens really jazzed my imagination and I was gratified to know that such fascinating fantasy was being written prior to the 30s, 40s and 50s. The lead paragraph on page 6 describing the themes of this author's stories whetted my appetite for more. I hope I can find a copy of this book.

The article about "Mighty Sampson" reinforced one of my pet convictions; that a generous seasoning of realism helps raise the credibility level of any SF or fantasy piece, and is invaluable in creating reader appeal. Lacking this, the creation degenerates into a realm of incredibility which renders it worthless. The editor admonishes the reader not to make the mistake of buying this volume. He need not worry about me!

The article concerning the biography of Verna Felton answered a lot of questions I've always had about this lady, whose talent I've encountered in many places (including the Disney cartoons mentioned). I remember her especially from "December Bride" and also "Pete and Gladys", which was not mentioned. In "Pete and Gladys" she re-created the role of Hilda and played opposite Harry Morgan and the late Carra Williams. I should mention that the editor made a slight error in this review. It was the Queen of Hearts, not the Red Queen that Verna Felton voiced in the "Alice in Wonderland" animation feature; signature line: Off With His Head! I'm grateful to Mr. Tucker for documenting the life and talent of someone who hitherto has not received much copy. Robert Bloch's article was highly enlightening. His recollections of all the hard work, trials, tribulations and disappointments in creating that radio series were very interesting. I personally remember enjoying Mr. Bloch's work very much, both his writing and his scripts for TV shows.

I'm looking forward to the next issue. *Don't* beam me up Scotty; there is intelligent life here.

///Sometimes, especially when I read the daily news papers, I wonder about that.///

#### ARTIST CREDITS FOR THIS ISSUE

front cover by D. Bruce Barry

Page 23 by Beiller

page 25 by Brad W. Foster