

The 1940's Radio Hour  
by Walton Jones

Directed by Carl Lindberg

Stage Manager	.....	Andy Bakehouse
Music Director	.....	Stela Burdt
Set Designer	.....	Eric Bunge, Jason Underferth
Lighting Designer	.....	Jason Underferth
Costume Designer	.....	Jason Lee Resler
Sound Designer	.....	Stan Peal
ASL Interpreter	.....	Gail Deveraux

(Dec 6 Performance)

### **Cast (in order of appearance)**

Pops Bailey	.....	Stan Peal
Johnny Cantone	.....	Eric Bunge
Clifton Feddington	.....	David Hennessey
Wally Fergusson	.....	Troy Iverson
Ginger Brooks	.....	Stef Dickens
Connie Miller	.....	Irene ErkenBrack
Neal Tilden	.....	Sheldon Rogers
Ann Collier	.....	Stela Burdt
Biff Baker	.....	Tim Sailer

### **Setting**

The studio of WOV, New York City, December 21, 1942.

This play will be performed without an intermission

### **Notes from the director**

As we enter into the holidays many of us find our minds wandering to gifts, reunions with family, and the coming year. These thoughts may seem gloomier due to the economy and the fact that many Americans will be celebrating this season overseas while protecting us here at home. This is not the first Christmas our country has been in this position.

And though we have trials yet to face, there are still places of warmth and excitement. We still have our community of friends to gather and celebrate with, and what better place for enrichment and joy than the theatre? In 1942, the year our play is set, Americans listened to the radio for entertainment. Almost 70 years later, we have many other mediums through which we can isolate ourselves for news and relaxation. It is exciting for me, and I hope for you by the end of the evening, that we can share an experience together, actors and audience as one, as family.

The group of wannabes and performers you journey with today represent a community held together by delight and excitement, energy and expectations in the midst of World War II. We hope that the enthusiasm and fun we are having is carried to you through our airwaves here within the Commonweal, placing an inexplicable and everlasting warm glow on your holiday season.

~ Carl Lindberg

### **Notes on the Play: The Community That Listens Together**

One hundred years ago, the hobbyists and technophiles in America had a new toy to play with. Wireless broadcast. The technology which had previously been limited to Morse code communications was now being expanded to include the human voice. At first, these were novel one-time experiments, but soon individual operators began evolving into full-time stations broadcasting music, news, advertising and entertainment. Individual stations linked together to form networks and the radio quickly became a mainstay in virtually every American household. It was at the side of the family radio that Americans learned of Charles Lindbergh's Atlantic flight and the Stock Market Crash. Radio made Jack Benny, Edward R Murrow, and Jimmy Durante as familiar and welcome as the next-door neighbors. And the rapport it created between the American people and FDR surely contributed in no small part to his unprecedented success at re-election.

For the first time, technology was delivering the world into each and every home live, as it happened, no matter where it was happening. The result was a unification of the American people to a degree never before possible. As a nation, the United States has always grappled with the paradox of its own cultural identity i.e., unity through diversity. America has sold the image of the rugged individual, yet from the very beginning the national fabric has been multi-colored and multi-cultured. There is a strong gravitational force sometimes to focus on our differences (Midwesterner versus East Coaster, Minnesotan versus Wisconsinite, rural Minnesota versus Twin Cities) but while still a relatively young nation in the 1930s and 40s, the advances in communication technology helped forge a collective identity during two of the most difficult decades in our history.

Nowadays, of course, our interactions with the world are much more fractured. We receive news and information from a variety of sources and mediums and customize our entertainment options to the nth degree. To some, this may seem like the notion of family- and community-bonding has faded to an archaic notion - but then again, look around you right now in the theatre. A community, albeit one which will only exist for a brief period of time, has gathered together for a shared experience not unlike sitting by the radio set in the living room waiting for a favorite program.

We are now On the Air.

### **THE WOV CAVALVADE OF STARS**

CLIFTON A. FEDDINGTON, with his partner, Saul Lebowitz, has been producing The Mutual Manhattan Variety Cavalcade since its inception six years ago last week. It's been a long climb for Clifton and his Cavalcade. He began at WHK in Cleveland in the much-acclaimed children's program, Let's Have Lunch With Mr. Cliff. Then, on to Philadelphia where local radio audiences tuned in nightly to a community radio theatre group, The Feddington Players. Then, in

1935, with seed money from sixteen sponsors, Mr. Feddington landed a fifteen-minute musical variety show called Stars In Heaven which featured his recent singing discoveries, Ann Collier, Johnny Cantone and Neal Tilden. In 1936, Mutual expanded the show to a half-hour and re-named it The Mutual Half-Hour Of Singing Stars. Just last January, through a deal with New York's WOV Radio, the show became the hour-long Cavalcade we love today and tonight's show is the last in our first season. Mr. Feddington also is President of Clifton Records (the signature series), which will be into production as soon as the ASCAP strike is settled.

JOHNNY CANTONE first excited listeners in his native Brooklyn, New York where Johnny opened the '39 Pro-Am Duckpin Tourney with his version of The Star Spangled Banner. Since then he has sung "The Anthem" at hundreds of sporting events (including his own unsuccessful attempt to unseat the defending welter-weight champ Eldon Dwight). Now "featured vocalist" with WOV's Cavalcade, Johnny has come a long way from those clubs in Jersey where he fronted bands for five years before the Cavalcade happened along. "The Tone" hopes to begin his acting career with his upcoming engagement to read Odets on Don McNeill's "Breakfast Club" in March. He also hopes to be able to spend more time with his wife, Angel. Soon.

GINGER BROOKS moved everything to New York in the fall of 1940. It was only a year until she landed the coveted position of microphone monitor at WACL. But it wasn't long before she was cutting records for Artie Shaw. But her real forte was singing so she left the technical position and became an overnight success as the only singing waitress and stacker at Romeo's Spaghetti House. Ginger's favorite color is red.

ANN COLLIER was singing with her sisters in Montclair, New Jersey when she was only seven. When she went away to school, she worked on WJSV's Dr. Pepper Parade on Sunday nights and was offered tours with Claude Thornhill and the King Biscuit Entertainers. In '35, she returned to her native Montclair and sang with dance bands there where she was discovered by WOV's own Clifton Feddington and swept into New York and into the limelight of his Cavalcade where she was "featured vocalist" for three years. She has been with the show for six years now and we hope she'll be here for six more. Ann lives with her four year old son Matthew on the Upper East Side of Manhattan.

CONNIE MILLER comes all the way from Ogden, Utah where she studied tap, ballet, and ballroom at Madame Stephen's Dance Academy. At age ten, she and her mother lived in Los Angeles and while she was working as a script girl for Columbia Pictures she kept the crews entertained with her imitations of Shirley Temple and Margaret O'Brien. After not being cast as Robert Young's daughter in Joe Smith, American, Connie and her mom came to New York and auditioned for Clifton at WOV. Now the youngest member of the Cavalcade, Connie hopes one day to become a Rockette.

BIFF BAKER began his love of entertainment as a popcorn vendor at the Royale Movie House in Greenwood, Indiana. He quickly made his way to New York where he began as a technician at WBO where a chance encounter with Clifton Feddington led to a spot on the Mutual Half Hour of Singing Stars. Since then he has been singin' and dancin' and smilin' his way into the hearts of Radio Listeners everywhere. However, his proudest moment came when he was promoted to 2nd Lieutenant in the Army Air Corps. Currently stationed at Fort Bragg, New Jersey, he is eagerly awaiting his chance to serve. Biff would like to thank his parents and send love to Connie.

NEAL TILDEN exploded on the vocal horizon with Nestor Nugent's Tornadoes at Tarrytown's Café O'ola. On to greater heights, and the fabled nine-week tour of '34 with the late, great Wes Westerley, who after losing Neal, lamented, "It was like losing a horn". Neal has been with the Cavalcade since before it was even a twinkle in Clifton's eye, and he still keeps a hand in club singing, and a hand in radio singing, and a hand in stage acting too (he was recently up for the role of the understudy to Gil Strutton, Jr. in the Broadway smash *Best Foot Forward*). But his first love is the Cavalcade, and he says he's delighted to be handling vocal chores with an "O.K. outfit" like ours. "Thanks, Neal!"

## WORLD WAR II

Just over one year before this broadcast, it was a typical Sunday afternoon by the radio -- light music, drama, public affairs programs, pro football. But at 2:22 pm, a one-line bulletin flashes over the Associated Press wire, shattering the tranquility. Within minutes, the news of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii is being relayed by all four networks. Radio covers the story in depth -- and perhaps the most chilling moment is the voice of an unnamed staff announcer at NBC's Honolulu affiliate, proclaiming, "This is no joke! This is war!" The following day, record audiences tune in as President Roosevelt's message to a joint session of Congress sets the tone for the next four years.

War was declared the very next day (Dec. 8, 1941) on Japan by the United States, the Commonwealth of Nations (except Ireland), and the Netherlands. Within a few days Germany and Italy declared war on the United States.

Australia became the chief Allied base for the countermoves against Japan, directed by Gen. Douglas MacArthur, Admiral Nimitz, and Admiral Halsey. The first Allied naval successes against Japan were scored in the battles of the Coral Sea and Midway, where U.S. bombers knocked out the major part of Japan's carrier fleet and forced Japan into retreat. Midway was the first decisive blow against the Axis by Allied forces. On land the Allies took the offensive in New Guinea and landed (Aug. 7, 1942) on Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands.

Following these crucial battles, morale was high and the American people stood firmly behind the war efforts. Clifton Feddington's last words to the radio audience before signing off are, "Buy bonds." This refers to the practice of civilians investing in the war. The bonds paid for ships, materials, food for the troops, and other necessities, and people were promised an eventual return on their investment. This was a popular, tangible way to show support for the government and the men fighting overseas.

Another common way for Americans to help the war effort was through knitting. The November 24, 1941, cover story of the popular weekly magazine *Life* explained "How To Knit." Along with basic instructions and a pattern for a simple knitted vest, the article advised, "To the great American question 'What can I do to help the war effort?' the commonest answer yet found is 'Knit.'" The Red Cross supplied patterns for sweaters, socks, mufflers, fingerless mitts (which allowed soldiers to keep their hands warm while shooting), toe covers (for use with a cast), and other garments knitted in olive drab or navy blue wool yarn.

In the radio advertisements, Clifton makes many references to what life was like for those who weren't fighting in the war. For example, the government dealt with shortages by rationing scarce consumer goods. Coupon books were given out, which were used to purchase limited supplies of sugar, butter, lard, meat, fats, coffee, gasoline and processed foods. A sugar coupon gave a purchaser the right to buy one pound of sugar every other week.

While still enjoying the fruits of creative programming, radio did reflect many changes in 1942 as the war continued:

- Jan. 5: Manila radio stations are "dismantled and destroyed" to keep them from falling into hands of Japanese.
- Jan. 19: Censorship code outlaws man-on-the-street and other ad-lib interviews and quiz programs.
- Feb. 2: Broadcasters' Victory Council is formed as liaison with all government agencies having wartime radio functions; chairman is John Shepard III, preside Yankee Network.
- Feb. 2: FCC shuts off construction of new stations in all areas now getting primary service, pending formal orders from War Production Board freezing broadcast assignments for duration.
- Feb. 23: The Advertising Council is organized by advertisers, agencies and media to put the talents and techniques of advertising at the disposal of government inspire and instruct the public concerning various phases of the war effort.
- Feb. 23: CBS cuts time allowed for commercials on newscasts by 20%, bans jingles or other "undue gaiety," puts restrictions on middle commercials.
- March 23: Office of Censorship forbids any mention of weather on baseball broadcasts.
- March 23: Committee on War Information issues war policies, pledges that public will get bad news as well as good, so long as no aid is given enemy.
- April 20: War Production Board cuts supply of shellac for phonograph records to 30% of preceding year's figure; transcriptions, made of vinylite, are not affected.
- May 4: FCC issues freeze order on station construction.
- July 20: Broadcasting is declared an essential industry by Selective Service System.
- Nov. 2: Government leases shortwave stations from private owners; Office of War Information and Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs to handle programming.

### About Our Production

At the beginning of the play, we are watching preparations for the live broadcast which is due to begin in 30 minutes. We are using the given architecture of the theatre to help fill in the reality of what would have been a hotel ballroom in Times Square, New York City. Our "Queen's box" will serve as a practical booth for mixing sound and controlling the lights. In fact, the production's stage manager will also be a recognizable character in the show from his booth. You will also notice a table with miscellaneous props, later used to create live sound effects for the radio show.

Four live microphones are used in the production, one for the sound effects and three for the performers. Although they are brand new, they accurately imitate the style of the 1940's microphone.

Most of the old time variety shows featured a full band backing up the singers. Due to restrictions of space and personnel for this production, the director had to come up with an alternative. He decided that the singing would be live, but the music would be "canned", or pre-recorded. The recording was all done digitally in a studio, and is played back over the theatre's sound system. However, the director established a convention that the music is coming from the record player onstage, which is operated by the performers.

Along with the actors onstage, you play a part as well: that of the radio station's studio audience. Once the "broadcast" begins, you are directly addressed by the performers and asked to participate by applauding when given a signal.

Keep in mind that radio was the primary form of entertainment for many Americans. Television had not yet become affordable for average citizens. Live music, radio theatre, and comedy routines were listened to thanks to weekly broadcast programming on major stations, which would become the foundation for future television channels and stations. *1940's Radio Hour* is an example of a variety show, meaning it included song, humor, and stories.

### Questions for Discussion

1. If you were to produce an hour-long radio show, what would the format be? How would you choose the content?
2. In the early days of radio, it was considered in "poor taste" to blatantly advertise for goods or services. How do you notice "advertisements" appearing in the broadcast? Do you like this way better than the way ads are done nowadays?
3. In the 1940's, the radio was the best technology available to stay connected with other communities across the country. How many outlets for communication do we have today? Which do you think is the most influential, or the most effective?
4. World War II has a profound effect on the characters in *The 1940's Radio Hour*. What changes have you noticed in the world since September 11, 2001 as seen in movies, television, music, and advertising?
5. How is the war effort of the 1940's similar to our own now in 2009? How is it different?