

In Search of the Ultimate Fantasy

A journey to Old Radio

Hank Malone

1968

I

To those of you tenderly under 20: imagine, if you dare, that tomorrow you could no longer obtain records anywhere. Imagine that all the record stores were suddenly boarded up. Imagine that all of your records and tapes have mysteriously disappeared, your stereo is missing, and that it is now impossible to gain access to music anywhere in the world. Pretend, for a moment, that all the musicians everywhere have suddenly left without notice!

Now—for those of you tenderly under 20—you have a vague idea how it feels for SOME OF US OVER 20 to be without such strange-sounding creatures as: The Inner Sanctum, Can You Top This, Dimension X, Lights Out, It Pays to be Ignorant, and The Hermit's Cave. For us, they were among the names of God, They were called—Radio Programs.

II

“Radio programs” probably mean less than nothing to people under 20, and for good reason. Who under 20 has ever heard a good radio program? What passes for broadcasting today, when it is not patently hysterical, is totally sterile and stupefying. As it presently exists (yes, even you Uncle Russ) radio is an ancient mausoleum of the human spirit, crawling with vestigial perverts and livid platter-chattering worms.

In recent years, however, it has become fashionable to resurrect OLD RADIO by pursuing Trivia Quiz; by sentimentally sloughing-up distant but persistent junk-mail recollections. (e.g. “What was the name of inventor LORENZO JONES’s wife?” Answer: “Bell”. Or, “What high school did Jack Armstrong attend? Answer: “Hudson High”.) But to the question that inevitably follows such a long sentimental journey into radio trivia, “Say, why don’t they bring back old radio programs?” there has never been a decent reply. Usually everyone just sits around shaking their heads. Finally, out of mercy, someone changes the subject.

For SOME OF US OVER 20 it has seemed likely that OLD RADIO would die with those who retain her first-hand memories, and forever be a Sphinx-like riddle for those who were never there. Perhaps so, but there IS new hope on the horizon. Read on.

III

Why should anyone who has never heard a great OLD RADIO program want to hear one?

Well, with the death of the “Golden Age of Radio” (occurring during the 1950s like a massive erosion of the American spirit) there went some of the most unheralded treasures of the 20th century, extraordinary 30-minute trips that had more impact on the Crucial States of Consciousness than, say all the Acapulco Gold in Mexico. Interested?

Radio is perhaps the finest and most sensitive Tripping media ever, inadvertently devised, for what was originally thought to be its greatest limitation—a lack of visual interest—turned out to be its greatest strength. Radio made its great appeal to the Unconquered Mind and Imagination.

Through the use of sound effects, music, and a very special kind of writing and acting, radio created a psychic world which had to be believed to be seen.

Imaginative participation was not merely desirable, it was essential. Like haiku, radio provided a sketch, but it was up to the listener to Trip and create the finished picture. The listener always created the Greater Reality. Radio was a very personal medium a Tripping medium—nothing was impossible in the world of radio!

As writer Charles Beaumont has said of it: “In a single evening one could travel up the Yangtze; fight ravenous wolves in the frozen wastes of the Yukon, ascend into the stratosphere in a leaking balloon, skim the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean, get trapped by an avalanche; and sink into a coma as the result of having been pierced by a dart tipped with deadly curare.” Night after night after night, Tripping from one wild universe into another.

IV

At this point, one must presumably (in articles of this sort) get all teary and bleary-eyed, and say—slowly and sadly—“Well, those days are gone and we can’t go back to all that.” Then, half-heartedly saluting the heavens, we start to bid a reluctant farewell to all those “lost hours of enchantment, all the laughter and fear and dreaming”—a salute and a farewell. BUT WAIT! NO! THIS STORY HAS A DIFFERENT ENDING!

This writer has refused to let go of all those dreams, and with a near-frantic diligence, winding his way in and out of a labyrinth of clues, hunches, and tip-offs, he has managed to reach back into Yesterday, unearthing a rare and fabulous mine of gleaming Radio Programs. Yes, mind-boggling as it may seem, Radio is Here Again. Great Trips for Everyone! Now now now now now now! YOU CAN GET THEM YOURSELF! YES, FOR YOUR VERY OWN PLEASURE TO KEEP AND PLAY OVER AND OVER! Want the details? Keep reading this ad.

Despite the idea to which most “radio sentimentalists” have unwittingly fallen prey—namely, that nobody ever recorded and preserved old radio programs—it appears that, in fact, a very great number of people actually did so! And during the last few years these people have almost miraculously found one another, pooled their resources, and have built a vast collection of OLD RADIO programs which they preserve on tape. And miracle of miracles, these tapes (hundreds of them) are available to you from this coterie of collectors who have made them commercially available to other collectors!

Here, for instance, are the names of a few of these visionary audiophiles who make programs and catalogues of programs available:

- (1) Bill Thailing, Box 352, Willow Station, Cleveland, Ohio.
- (2) Chester Skala, 2222 South Albany, Chicago, Illinois.
- (3) Edwin Knapp, 300 N. Grant Avenue, Three Rivers, Michigan.

These apostles of OLD RADIO seem to have gigantic collections available. One can, for instance, obtain clear recordings of such greats as Carl Stephenson’s “Leiningen Versus the Ants,” and Ray Bradbury’s “Third Expedition,” and “Zero Hour.” You’ll also want to Trip on “The Marvelous Barastro” (featuring Orson Welles), as well as on perhaps one of the greatest radio programs of all time—“The Thing on the Fourble Board.”

So, the reader is hereby invited to feast himself—on the Revelations of OLD RADIO. Once heard, the reader will no doubt, like this writer, wonder why such marvelous and lovely worlds were ever abandoned for the Cathode Cyclops. More than that, perhaps the reader will then join that steadily-growing cadre of radio-militants who may, through their revolutionary reminiscences, lead us all out of our AM-FM Dark Ages into a renaissance of the ancient marijuana-songs of the super-heterodyne.

fifth Estate

Hank Malone
In Search of the Ultimate Fantasy
A journey to Old Radio
1968

<https://www.fifthestate.org/archive/61-sept-5-18-1968/in-search-of-the-ultimate-fantasy>
Fifth Estate #61, Sept. 5-18, 1968

[fifthestate.anarchistlibraries.net](https://www.fifthestate.org)