

FORECAST

Is There a Sponsor in the House?

Written by Martin Grams, Jr.

The trial-and-error system being an old if frequently painful institution in the show business (else all stage plays would be hits, and all radio programs would have an Amos and Andy average in the Crossley ratings), the Columbia Broadcasting System's *Forecast* series shrewdly dramatized the fact that there is no such phenomenon as a sure thing. For two particular seasons, the CBS people enlivened summer's somewhat lethargic air waves with a schedule of experimental entertainments which, to tell the truth, aren't experimental in the exact sense of the word, but have nevertheless a refreshing air about them, if only for the ideas they represented.

The idea is that neither CBS nor anyone else knew, until they were produced, whether the programs were any good or not, though they were of course, hoping for the best. And, very sensibly, they made a game of it. Whereas the listener during the busy season was told to take what he got and, if possible, like it, *Forecast* invited criticism. Listening to the various episodes, one could not help but applaud for Marlene Dietrich in "The Thousand and One Nights," and convulsed with laughter as they listened to the amorous antics of "Mischa the Magnificent." (Mischa Auer, that is.) Whatever it was that made people bet on horse races or write letters to the editor, they could file an honest opinion about the programs and then sat back to await the verdict.

If the public, in sufficient numbers, liked a *Forecast* sample – as they liked "Duffy's Tavern" during the first season – the chances were that the fully developed product would be on the air after the fall semester opened. On the other hand, a negative response or some hearty, candid disapproval would prevent a lot of headaches, save a good many dollars, in the months to come.

Speaking of dollars, it is giving away no trade secret to say that the producing company did not do all this out of sheer altruism. It probably believed in health, but was not in the business for it. It was looking for program sponsors as well as for new writing and acting talent. To a potential sponsor, it said, in effect, "Here is a show and here is the public reaction to it, and perhaps with a little play-doctoring and some recasting . . ." A tryout is a tryout, almost anywhere, with this radio's audience enjoys over the theater's: it paid no \$3.30 per seat for a tussle with the arts in an out-of-town playhouse. It paid nothing at all, and it sat comfortably at home. There was a good deal to be said for that.

How much was to be said for the *Forecast* broadcasts, and the public response cannot be found. Still, if

the program did make it to the airwaves for a regular run, say the highly successful "Duffy's Tavern," we can only suspect the reviews favorable. Take the episode "The Thousand and One Nights." According to the New York Times:

"It had it's points, to be sure. It had Miss Dietrich, whose sultry voice fitted into the pattern of enchantment evoked by the Rimsky-Korsakoff music; and Miss Dietrich's is a voice that can all but live up to even the gaudy introduction arranged for her in a script not notable for its understatement. ("Let her name echo from the furthest mountain top," said a lackey after a proper roll of drums.) But what is virtually a monologue, by Miss Dietrich or anyone else, is hard to take for an hour, or even the half hour which the successful *Forecasts* will have for running-time."

But not everything was new. One of the *Forecast* broadcasts, "51 East 51" raised a curtain toward an audience that no doubt, found it difficult to see anything experimental about it, unless it was that no one else has heretofore presented a radio sketch called "51 East 51." Otherwise, things were as they usually were in fables about nightclubs, including the song cues introduced as with a sledge-hammer. It was described in advance as "a new musical show with comedy and vice versa" (whatever that meant), but it sounded rather like vaudeville in its last, unhappy phase, with no more for a plot than Kay Thompson ("our midnight girl of music") tormented by a couple of practical jokers, the while she poured out her unhappy heart in song. Seems I've heard this before somewhere.

Another déjà vu was the "Hopalong Cassidy" entrance without William Boyd playing the role of Hoppy. Clarence E. Mulford, the creator of the fictional character, sat within listening distance of his radio set the night Hopalong Cassidy first rode onto radio, originating from the New York studio. "I found it interesting," he was quoted of saying. "I naturally hope there are more of them." Mulford's agent worked actively to land a sustaining series, possibly over the NBC station, according to researcher Bernard Drew, but without success. It wouldn't be until William Boyd took over the Cassidy property for television that the radio market was exploited. After this *Forecast* broadcast, Hopalong would never grace the radio waves until 1950. (They were working on pre-production of the series in 1946, but it still took four years till the show became a reality.) The only thing I have yet to solve is the script itself. Having heard the broadcast years ago, I recalled, half-way through the program, that the same script was later used for another western radio broadcast (or perhaps a B-class western picture) because the plot was not only familiar, but I knew in detail how the ending was going to turn out without hearing it yet. Would anyone know if this script was later done on another Hopalong episode?

The opinions varied, the critics were pleased or disgusted (whichever viewpoint the readers of their columns accepted), but one thing definitely stood in stone. *Forecast* was a good idea. Though most were not really experimental – *The Columbia Workshop* presented more experimental dramas than *Forecast* – they were highly entertaining. With many Hollywood stars backing some of the productions with their

appearances, Burgess Meredith, Herbert Marshall, Duke Ellington, and even Hedda Hopper included, the program entertained and dazzled listeners. NBC even began their own summer audition/pilot series in 1950 entitled *Advance Release* offering various stars in various dramas and musical presentations. Imitation is often the sincerest form of flattery.

The following is a broadcast log listing each *Forecast* broadcast aired. Keep in mind that the program had a full-hour time slot and many of these airings offered two half-hour programs. A majority of the broadcasts do exist and are in circulation among collectors, but remain individual recordings. For the July 29, 1940 broadcast, as an example, the "Duffy's Tavern" presentation stands alone on cassette and CD without "Angel" accompany. Therefore, I have numbered each presentation as an individual episode, and the leangth of time they aired.

Both *Forecast* series were summer replacements for *The Lux Radio Theatre*, heard over the CBS network, Monday evenings from 9 to 10 p.m., EST.

- EPISODE #1 "**BATTLE OF MUSIC**" Broadcast on July 15, 1940

Starring: Arlene Francis, Freda Gibson, Frankie Hyers and Raymond Paige and his orchestra.

Written for *Forecast* by George Faulkner.

Directed by George Zachary.

Plot: An entertaining battle of the bands as some people refer to call such a broadcast, using a symphonic orchestra and a swing band to play one on one, vying for the title of "the better band." Albert Spaulding supplies the violin music. Gordon Gifford and Joe Venuti also perform. George Zachary, who was presently directing the weekly mystery, *The Adventures of Ellery Queen*, also directed this broadcast. This program never made it as a regular series. (30 m.)

- EPISODE #2 "**THE AMERICAN THEATER: THE GENTLEMAN FROM INDIANA**"

Broadcast on July 15, 1940

Starring: Frederic March and his wife Florence Eldridge

Music composed by Lucien Moraweck and conducted by Lud Gluskin.

Plot: Similar to *The Cavalcade of America*, this dramatic anthology was supposed to present a different drama based on historical fact from American history. But unlike *The Cavalcade of America*, this program didn't last very long at all. In fact, this was the only presentation. John Houseman (yes, the same Houseman of famed "War of the Worlds" broadcast) directed this broadcast, who also wrote the script, based on the Booth Tarkington novel of the same name, written in 1899. The story concerns a crusading newspaper editor and the mysterious "H. Frisby." (Small story origin trivia: Tarkington was born in Indianapolis, Indiana.) (30 m.)

- EPISODE #3 "**WHEN YOU WERE TWENTY-ONE**" Broadcast on July 22, 1940

Starring: Jane Cowl, Joan Edwards, Rush Hughes and Danny Kaye

Plot: This broadcast, a comedy-variety show, a forerunner of that "wonderful year" idea, presents a nostalgic look back at 1919. What makes this broadcast interesting is that the script was written by three people: Sylvia Fine, Nathaniel Curtis, and Ed Forman. John Tillman was the announcer. Brewster Morgan was the director. Lyn Murray composed and conducted the music. (30 m.)

- EPISODE #4 "**SUSPENSE: THE LODGER**" Broadcast on July 22, 1940

Starring: Noreen Gammill, Edmund Gwenn, Joseph Kearns, Herbert Marshall and Lurene Tuttle

Based on the 1913 novella of the same name by Marie Belloc Lowndes.

Music composed and conducted by Wilbur Hatch.

Plot: Regardless of what many people (including myself) always thought, this broadcast is *not* really the audition show for the popular, and long-running anthology of the airwaves. The proposal for this presentation was to allow Alfred Hitchcock, a film director who, only a year before, arrived in America to direct movies, host his own anthology program using adaptations of his many motion pictures already filmed. The drama presented here was about a boarding house couple who suspect that their new lodger is none other than "saucy Jack." This episode was an adaptation of the 1926 silent English film directed by Alfred Hitchcock. Other proposals for future broadcasts were "The 39 Steps" and "The Lady Vanishes." Herbert Marshall and Edmund Gwenn played the starring roles merely for publicity reasons – they were both the stars of Warner Bros.'

latest picture, *Foreign Correspondent*, directed by Hitchcock.

Since Alfred Hitchcock was not yet a household celebrity (that would come in the mid-fifties with his TV program), none of the listeners knew what Hitchcock sounded like. So Joseph Kearns used an English accent and played the role of Hitchcock himself. The master of suspense wasn't even on his own program. Two years after this broadcast, CBS gave a short summer time-slot for a proposed series of the same name, which in turn, would become the *Suspense* series horror fans would come to recognize. The true director of this production remains unknown – they mentioned Hitchcock but we all know it isn't true. Part of the Hollywood lure that now leaves a mystery yet unsolved. (30 m.)

- EPISODE #5 "**ANGEL**" Broadcast on July 29, 1940

Starring: Elliott Lewis and Loretta Young

Written for *Forecast* by True Boardman.

Directed by Glenhall Taylor.

Music composed and conducted by Wilbur Hatch.

Plot: Loretta Young plays a Red Cross volunteer training to be a nurse, only to find she has to put her talents to the test during a massive flood. Unlike episode #2, this broadcast played more like a *Cavalcade of America* broadcast, and would have fit the mold. Dick Joy was the announcer. (30 m.)

- EPISODE #6 "**DUFFY'S TAVERN**" Broadcast on July 29, 1940

Starring: Larry Adler, Mel Allen, Ed Gardner, Gertrude Niesen and F. Chase Taylor

Music supplied by John Kirby and his Orchestra.

Plot: "Duffy's Tavern, where the elite meet to eat. Archie the manager speaking. No, Duffy ain't here. Oh – hello Duffy." The first trip to the tavern, which shortly after, became a popular long-running comedy series, a short-run television program, and a 1945 all-star movie. (30 m.)

- EPISODE #7 "**OF STARS AND STATES**" Broadcast on August 5, 1940

Starring: Nan Grey, Hedda Hopper, Mary Martin, Ann Miller and Red Ryder

John Boles is the host.

Directed by Charles Vanda.

Music composed and conducted by Wilbur Hatch. Lud Gluskin is musical supervisor.

Plot: Similar to the concept of *Parade of the States*, which aired over NBC from 1931 to 1932, this program proposed saluting a different state each week and the famous stars who came from that state. For this broadcast, a lyrical history of Texas, and it's historical aspects including Sam Houston. The Governor of Texas, W. Lee O'Daniel, and some Texas Ranger appeared. Also in the cast is Kitty O'Neil, Dickie Jones, Virginia Vail, Donald Barry, and Knox Manning. (60 m.)

- EPISODE #8 "**THE LIFE OF THE PARTY**" Broadcast on August 12, 1940

Starring: Fred Hall, Hildegarde, Cortez Peters, David Ross and Shirley Wayne

Dave Ellman is the host, producer and director.

Plot: A variety program, a cross between *Major Bowes* and *Spike Jones*, this broadcast features Cortez Peters (who imitates a fife and drums corps and Bill Robinson's dancing . . . on a typewriter!), a guy who plays music on a fire extinguisher, David Ross reads poetry, Shirley Wayne plays the violin wearing heavy gloves, Joseph Julian plays music by squeezing his hands together, Fred Hall plays silent movie music on the piano, Hildegarde, The Dodgers Quartet (four Brooklyn ballplayers including Dixie Walker). (30 m.)

- EPISODE #9 "**LEAVE IT TO JEEVES**" Broadcast on August 12, 1940

Starring: Edward Everett Horton, Myra Marsh, Donald Morrison, Alan Mowbray and Helen Wood

Written for *Forecast* by Stuart Palmer.

Ken Niles is the announcer.

Music composed and conducted by Wilbur Hatch.

Plot: A proposed situation comedy series based on the characters created by P. G. Wodehouse. In this episode, Jeeves tries to get his boss, Bertie Wooster, out of lady-trouble. For some reason, I always thought this became a short-run summer series but after checking a few reference works, I can't seem to find it listed. Maybe I'm wrong, but I swear this program later had a short run on radio. (30 m.)

- EPISODE #10 "**BACK WHERE I CAME FROM**" Broadcast on August 19, 1940

Starring: Led Doyle, Clifton Fadiman, Woody Guthrie, Burl Ives and Josh White

Written by Alan Lomax and Nicholas Ray.

Directed by Nicholas Ray.

Plot: The program concerns itself about (of all things), the weather. Woody sings about the dust bowl, Burl does his famous "Foggy Dew," Josh White does a great sermon about Noah and the ark. The Golden Gate Quartet and John Henry Faulk also performs. (30 m.)

- EPISODE #11 "**EVER AFTER / TO TIM, AT TWENTY**" Broadcast on August 19, 1940

Starring: Roy Atwell, Edna Best, Elsa Lanchester, Charles Laughton, Mark Smith and Richard Whorf

"Ever After" written for *Forecast* by Keith Fowler.

"To Tim, at Twenty" written for *Forecast* by Norman Corwin.

Plot: This broadcast was a double feature. "Ever After" is an amusing comedy about Snow White and Prince Charming – three years later. The drama of "To Tim, At Twenty" concerns a letter written by a doomed man at war, addressed to his son fifteen years in the future. (30 m.)

- EPISODE #12 "**JUBILEE**" Broadcast on August 26, 1940

Starring: Duke Ellington, Wonderful Smith and Ethel Waters

This is one of four episodes not known to exist. The hour-long version from 1941 exists, but no one has yet been able to supply a copy of the 1940 version.

Plot: This all-star negro musical variety revue wasn't successful the first time around, but when it was redone the year after, the second time was a charm. (30 m.)

- EPISODE #13 "**BETHEL MERRIDAY**" Broadcast on August 26, 1940

Starring: Bob Burleson, Norman Corwin, Howard daSilva, Norman Field, Byron Kane, Margaret Sullavan, Lurene Tuttle and Paula Winslowe

Based on the 1940 novel of the same name by Sinclair Lewis, and adapted for *Forecast* by Helen Dutch.

Music composed and conducted by Wilbur Hatch.

Plot: In the novel, Lewis used own experiences as a stage actor and a member of a theater troop end of the thirties-years (among other things it played the main role in the piece *of It Can't Happen Here* after its novel of the same name). Despite the obtained facts over the theater the novel remains as the romance, the component that predominantly uninteresting action is just as pale. This on-air audition of a comedy/romance series about a small-town girl determined to become an actress on the stage. (30 m.)

SEASON TWO

- EPISODE #14 "**THE THOUSAND AND ONE NIGHTS**" Broadcast on July 14, 1941

Starring: Marlene Dietrich

This is one of four episodes not known to exist.

Information about this broadcast can be found in the text above. (60 m.)

- EPISODE #15 "**MEMORIES OF MISCHA, THE MAGNIFICENT**" Broadcast on July 21, 1941

Starring: Mischa Auer and Arthur Q. Bryan

Frank Goss is the announcer.

Written for *Forecast* by Roswell Rogers and Carl Hertzinger.

Directed by Sterling Tracy.

Music composed and conducted by Wilbur Hatch.

Plot: A situation comedy about a romantic but impoverished Casanova looking for love and the rent money.

New York Times review: "Things picked up a little with the advent of Mr. Auer, whose proximity to the comic spirit is a matter of some debate. That he had the studio audience fairly in stitches there seemed to be no doubt, unless the studio audience was obeying the "laugh" sign with special enthusiasm. This will suggest that Mr. Auer is one of those comedians who should be seen as well as heard, and very likely there is something in that theory." (30 m.)

- EPISODE #16 "**51 EAST 51**" Broadcast on July 21, 1941

Starring: Erik Rhodes, Lionel Stander, and Kay Thompson

This is one of four episodes not known to exist.

Information about this broadcast can be found in the text above. (30 m.)

- EPISODE #17 "**PIBBY AND THE HOULIHANS**" Broadcast on July 28, 1941

Starring: Dudley Digges

Written for *Forecast* by George Corey.

Directed by Earle McGill.

Music composed and conducted by Charles Paul.

Plot: An Irish situation comedy, in which Pibby thinks he's inherited a fortune, but not quite. Charles Paul, who also supplied organ music for radio's *Quiet, Please*, supplies the musical effects for this broadcast, using old Irish tunes to help create the setting. (30 m.)

- EPISODE #18 "**DEDUCTIONS DELUXE: THE MYSTERY OF THE PAINTED POODLE**"

Broadcast on July 28, 1941

Starring: Verna Felton, Adolphe Menjou, Vera Teasdale and Arthur Q. Bryan

Frank Goss is the announcer.

Music composed and conducted by Wilbur Hatch.

Plot: "Deductions Deluze" was a mystery program co-created by Keith Fowler and Frank Galen, who also co-wrote the script, and whom both received director credit! In the supporting cast were Jerry Moore, Edwin Max and Kathleen Fitz. (30 m.)

- EPISODE #19 "**SONG WITHOUT END**" Broadcast on August 4, 1941

Starring: Burgess Meredith and Margo

Plot: This program featured the dramatized version of the life of Claude Achille Debussy. A recording of this broadcast is supposed to exist, but I have yet been able to acquire a recording. So I have to rely on a letter to the editor of a newspaper, from August 19, so we can get an idea of what the broadcast was about. "The text was full, rounded; the dialogue was lyrical and tenderly poetic without becoming melodramatic or sentimental. The incidents of the life chosen were fictitious, whether fictionalized or not; this latter point I've been unable to check. The cuing-in of Debussy's own music to motivate and augment the action was, except for one-time lag, perfect, and the orchestrations and choices in the best of taste. Lastly, one cannot comment on the great work of Burgess Meredith in his portrayal of Debussy." (60 m.)

- EPISODE #20 "**CLASS OF '41**" Broadcast on August 11, 1941

Starring: Jim Backus, Abe Burrows, Gwen Davies and Arnold Stang

Jackson Wheeler was the announcer.

Music composed and conducted by Perry Lafferty.

Plot: A revue of "newcomers to showbiz," with performers writing their own material, and introducing them to the radio audience. Al Bernie, Ben Little, Jack Jordan, and The Choralites also supplied the entertainment. Jim Backus wrote his own material for his performance. Sid Rogers, Herb Rickles, Larry Berns, Sid Garfield were also writers. Abe

Burrows actually co-produced this episode with Mac Benoff. Lyn Murray and his Orchestra supplied some music. One interesting piece of trivia is a young Ernest Lehman being one of the writers. Lehman would later write script for major Hollywood films, including the Hitchcock picture *North by Northwest* in 1959. (30 m.)

- EPISODE #21 "**HOPALONG CASSIDY**" Broadcast on August 11, 1941

Starring: Lou Merrill and Gerald Mohr

Information about this broadcast can be found in the text above. (30 m.)

- EPISODE #22 "**THE COUNTRY LAWYER**" Broadcast on August 18, 1941

Starring: Edgar Barrier, Bea Benaderet, Arthur Q. Bryan, Berry Kroeger, Grace Leonard, Knox Manning and Edwin Max

Art Gilmore was the announcer.

Written for *Forecast* by Harold Medford.

Produced and directed by Charles Vanda.

Music composed and conducted by Wilbur Hatch.

Plot: A story about a rural lawyer named Samuel Seldon Partridge in mid-America during the 1880's. An eccentric old timer is accused of being a firebug. In the supporting cast: Benny Rubin, Earle Ross, Edgar Barrier, Jerry Hausner, Joseph Kearns and Kathleen Fitz. Hollywood actor Raymond Massey was the narrator. Harold Medford was also a Technical Sergeant for this broadcast. Frank Graham was the host. (30 m.)

- EPISODE #23 "**THREE WISHES**" Broadcast on August 25, 1941

Starring: Lynn Fontaine, Alfred Lunt and Paul Robeson

This is one of four episodes not known to exist.

Plot: Here's an old idea still appealing. Presented, like the others in the series, as a sample, "Three Wishes" presented scenes and songs and people that you once saw and cherished in the theater and would like to hear again. It seems Alexander Woollcott

suggested this notion, the sample consisted of his personal selections. The Sage of Bomoseen nominated "If Men Played Cards As Women Do," an old sketch of George S. Kaufman's. Also presented was "Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child" sung by Paul Robeson. The last scene of Maxwell Anderson's "Elizabeth the Queen" was played memorably by Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontaine. (30 m.)

- EPISODE #24 "**SEARCH FOR A SPONSOR: A TOUR OF HOLLYWOOD**"

Broadcast on August 25, 1941

Starring: Bert Lahr, Tony Martin and Linda Ware

Written for *Forecast* by Sam Perrin.

Directed by Herb Polesie, who also conceived the idea of this program.

Music supplied by David Rose and his Orchestra.

Plot: Tony Martin starts the program with "Tonight We Love," heard "for the first time anywhere." "Shangri-Lahr" opens a Hollywood beauty parlor. (Lahr played the role of the Cowardly Lion in the 1939 picture *The Wizard of OZ*.) An interesting musical review. Linda Ware supplies vocals. Frank Goss was the announcer. Nat Goldstone was the supervisor. (30 m.)

- EPISODE #25 "**JUBILEE**" Broadcast of September 1, 1941

Starring: Duke Ellington, Wonderful Smith and Ethel Waters

Plot: This hour-long all-star negro musical variety revue originates from both New York and Hollywood. The first half from NY, the second half via remote from California. Also in the musical cast are The Hall Johnson Choir, Hamtree Harrington, Flourney Miller, and The Juanita Hall Choir. This was a reprisal of last year's production, the only one repeated but this production ran a full hour, whereas the initial 1940 production ran 30 minutes. This program did pick up an AFRS production, designed for black GIs, with different bands beginning October of 1942. (60 m.)

Martin Grams, Jr. is the author/co-author of numerous books about old-time radio and television including INNER SANCTUM MYSTERIES: BEHIND THE CREAKING DOOR, THE SOUND OF DETECTION: ELLERY QUEEN'S ADVENTURES IN RADIO, THE ALFRED HITCHCOCK PRESENTS COMPANION, THE HISTORY OF THE CAVALCADE OF AMERICA, THE HAVE GUN WILL TRAVEL

COMPANION, INVITATION TO LEARNING, RADIO DRAMA, THE CBS RADIO MYSTERY THEATER, and the October 2003 release of INFORMATION PLEASE.



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