

# TV and Radio

## THE IDEA!

NOT a week goes by that two or three ambitious souls don't call me with a "great idea" for a radio or television show. If they only knew how to get it to the right people at some network our fortunes would be made. I'm always taken in as a partner right away.

Some of the ideas are not too bad. But I tell one and all to forget about it. And if you don't mind I'd like to take this space to demonstrate how difficult it is to get a radio or television show started. I know.

Some five or six years ago I was employed by a network which we shall not mention by name, and I came up with an idea for a program to be called "CBS Was There." The gimmick was simple. We would take great historical moments and place microphones on the scene as if the network had had its reporters and commentators covering the events. They were to be absolutely factual, written after much research, with the only anachronism being the microphones and the popular newscasters of our present day.

I discussed the idea with a gentleman who shares this space with me, Robert Lewis Shayon, a brilliant producer-writer-director also employed at the network. He shared my enthusiasm for the idea and between us we wrote an outline, emphasizing not only the entertainment value of such a show, but mentioning that it would be a great device to highlight history for the average listener. We turned in our outline and awaited a reply.

After a couple of weeks of silence I asked what was happening to the idea. The executives in charge seemed to like it. There was one hitch. The title. They were debating whether to call it "CBS WAS There" or "CBS IS There." After a few more weeks I happened to be in the office of the president of the network on other business, but mentioned casually my idea. He hadn't heard of it but he liked it and said let's do it.

Mr. Shayon and I got busy on our first show—"Abraham Lincoln Attends Ford's Theatre." When the script was finished there was still no starting date for the show, so we decided to cut a record and see what we had. From the very opening when John Daly was discovered with a hand-mike in the lobby of Ford's Theatre describing the crowds awaiting the arrival of the President . . . "there's John Dyatt and Mrs. Helen

Muzzy and there's John Wilkes Booth, the actor, he's not in the play this week, which is 'Our American Cousin' . . . to the arrival of the President—a short interview with him at the microphone . . . "some people say I do wrong to go to the theatre, but it relaxes me and helps me to bear my cross" . . . then into the theatre—a softly spoken description by Daly as the play unfolded—the mention of the President's box where he sat in a rocker—then the shot—the sudden realization that a President had been killed—and then to the newsroom at the network where Quincy Howe and Ned Calmer were reading bulletins of the assassin's escape—then back to the house where Mr. Lincoln had been carried—following which an overseas broadcast by Queen Victoria, then to Paris, France, then to St. Petersburg, Russia, where there was a statement by Leo Tolstoy, and winding up with the funeral train.

The record was played around the shop and still nothing happened. One day I called in John Crosby, the eminent *New York Herald Tribune* critic, and played it for him. He gave it one of his rare rave reviews. And finally the show was put on the air as a half-hour weekly program.

The first year it won the Peabody Award. The following year it won other awards as well. And then suddenly there was a change of regime and a new executive was put in charge of radio programs. "CBS Was There No More." The show was taken off the air despite its prestige and the glowing fan mail it had received.

Now are you ready for the punch line?

"CBS Was There" under the new title of "You Are There" is scheduled to go on television for that network this season. And who do you think, so the story goes, is going to write, direct, and produce one of the first shows? That's right. The executive who took it off the air some years ago.

—GOODMAN ACE.



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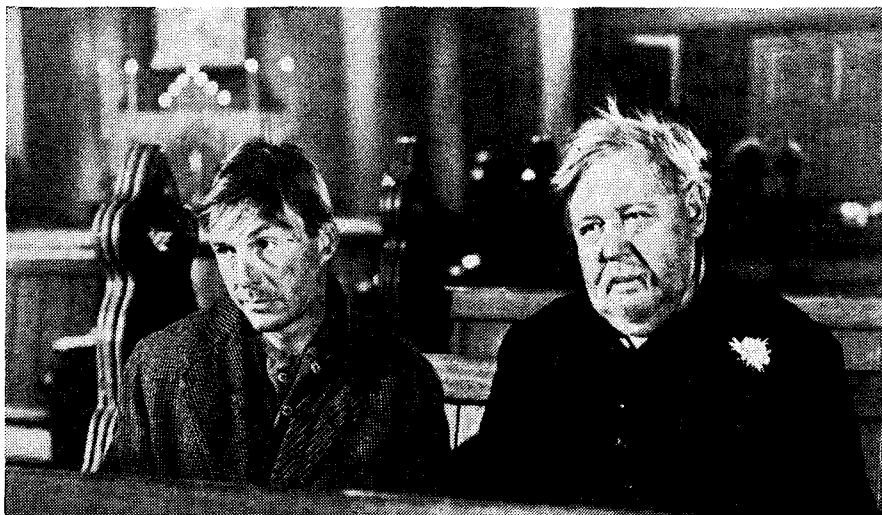
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**50¢** CHILDREN UNDER 12 ALL TIMES

# SR Goes to the Movies

## HOMAGE TO O. HENRY, FUN WITH FAUST



David Wayne and Charles Laughton in repentant mood—"O. Henry] faithfully rendered."

"WE are," wrote Lord Chesterfield, "more than half what we are by imitation. The great point is, to choose good models and to study them with care." This advice having penetrated to the precincts of Hollywood, it was only proper that the prosperous English filmings of Somerset Maugham short stories should have been chosen as models and scrutinized with attentive eyes. If W. S. Maugham could be anthologized on the screen, why not our own W. S. Porter? Accordingly, five directors, five screenwriters, and an imposing list of actors were assembled to grapple with the translation of O. Henry's succinct prose to the cinematic medium. The issue is to be seen in "O. Henry's Full House" (20th Century-Fox), a collection of five stories welded into a feature-length entity with narration by John Steinbeck.

After a few words in praise of O. Henry, Mr. Steinbeck takes down a volume from his bookshelves and begins to read the opening lines of "The Cop and the Anthem." In a moment we find ourselves in Madison Square ready to accompany Charles Laughton in his quest for a warm, annual, three-month incarceration in jail. The tribulations he undergoes in pursuit of this attainment are the concern of the story, and faithfully rendered it is, thanks to the adroit playing of Mr. Laughton and the idiomatic screenplay by Lamar Trotti. After watching Mr. Laughton's court arrest we are next shown Richard Widmark cannily endeavoring to evade it in "The Clarion Call." This is first-rate police drama, propelled by Mr. Wid-

mark's energetic portrayal of a manic criminal bent on outwitting a world peopled with "clamheads," and it maintains a steady crescendo to the surprise ending. Next on the agenda comes "The Last Leaf." The locale shifts to Greenwich Village, where a broken-hearted Anne Baxter has lost the will to live and is rapidly succumbing to pneumonia. How she regains her *joie de vivre* is the affair of her neighbor, a voluble, cyclonic, half-mad painter, none other—in fact—than Gregory Ratoff, who pretty well steals the show from Miss Baxter and her worried sister, Joan Peters.

Were the picture to end at this point it could be pronounced an unqualified success. But it does not so end, and with the story that follows, "The Ransom of Red Chief," complaints must begin. Here the screen treatment does scant justice to O. Henry's wry prose; it is coarse where the author was subtle and relies on broad exaggeration where he depended on understatement. Moreover, with one exception it is inadequately cast. That exception is Fred Allen, an entirely believable confidence man prepared to inflict his worst on the bumbling citizenry of Summit, Alabama. But Oscar Levant as his accomplice is ill at ease, self-conscious, and poorly attuned to the part and to O. Henry's brand of humor, while Lee Aaker is merely a typical Hollywood brat instead of a formidable hayseed hellion.

The finale, "Gift of the Magi," suffers from no such grievous flaws, but it is clearly a rung below the standard set in the first three stories. To describe the fault is easier than to assign

the cause. Its message of conjugal devotion and sacrifice is cloying, lachrymose, and eventually wearisome, but how much of this is due to the writing and direction, how much to the acting of Jeanne Crain and Farley Granger, and how much to its position as the last of five sequences is difficult to say. In truth, "O. Henry's Full House" may be too full, may contain at least one story too many; notwithstanding, it is well worth a visit.

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Having made its first appearance in the early sixteenth century and subsequently taken the form of Elizabethan tragedy, philosophical drama, symphonic poem, grand opera, and fiction, the Faust legend has lately been reconsigned to the cinema. Since René Clair is responsible for the latter manifestation, both as scenarist and director, it should come as no surprise that his Faust is endowed with a spirited leavening of frolic. The old story is nothing if not malleable. It stimulated the rodomontade of Marlowe, served as framework for Goethe's appraisal of man and society, and gave Gounod a pretext for composing some of the most mellifluous melodies known to tenor and soprano. Should it not, then, do duty just as well in rallying the charming wit of René Clair? It should, and it has. "Beauty and the Devil" (filmed in Italy, spoken in French) is Faust without fustian—and an engaging entertainment throughout.

It begins in the traditional manner, with old Faust shuffling about his laboratory and poring over musty tomes, when the voice of Mephistopheles is heard tempting him with the return of his youth. Before long the doddering pedant has been transmogrified into a most undoddering young man who takes the form and figure of Gérard Philipe and is soon making merry with a band of comely gypsy girls. But wine, women, and song cost money. Faust fingers through his pockets without success, races back to his laboratory, and returns to the tavern with a bag of his own hard-earned coins. For so doing he is arrested and charged both with burglary and the murder of poor old Professor Faust, whose mysterious disappearance had been the source of much local conjecture.

The scene shifts to a courtroom where young Faust is about to be sentenced to the gallows. To save himself he begins to recount the entire "diabolical" adventure. "Faust," he announces, "is in this very courtroom." But publicity of this kind is not what Mephistopheles had bargained for, and to cut the story short he suddenly appears before the judge in the guise of Professor Faust himself to explain