

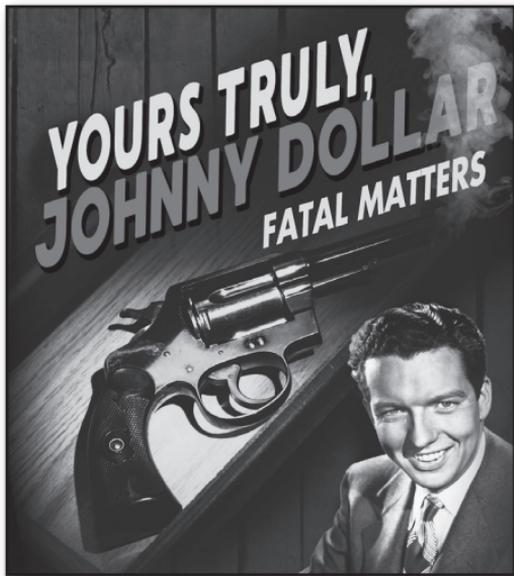
# YOURS TRULY, JOHNNY DOLLAR

## Fatal Matters

Program Guide by Ivan G. Shreve, Jr.

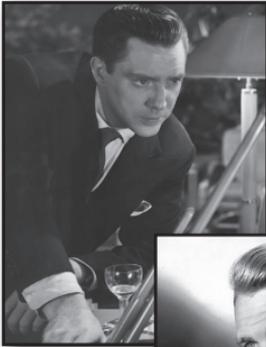
To radio audiences, Johnny Dollar was “America’s fabulous freelance insurance investigator.” It was an interesting premise at a time when private detectives were a glut on the nation’s airwaves. As old-time radio historian Elizabeth McLeod noted in 2015: “The postwar years were the Golden Era’s Golden Age of detective drama — a reasonably inexpensive format to produce, a reasonably easy format to write, and a reasonably simple format to cast. It was also a format with a ready appeal to bored ex-GI’s and their newly suburbanized families, people who were settling into nice, quiet, everyday lives after cleaning up that dirty business in Europe and the Pacific — people who welcomed a touch of excitement in their entertainment.” To stand out in the crowd, though, you had to have a gimmick...so Johnny Dollar was “The Man With the Action Packed Expense Account.”

Johnny had another artifice...one that was thankfully abandoned as the series evolved. Johnny would generously tip anyone who helped in his investigations—



busboys, bellhops, doormen, etc.—with a shiny silver dollar. Such a charitable gratuity would be the equivalent of ten dollars in today’s currency.

A 1948 audition for the series featured Dick Powell, and was followed by a January 14, 1949 recording spotlighting the eventually-hired Charles Russell. The protagonist frequently stumbled over his share of corpses during the course of his investigations, but the show’s format was flexible enough to include occasional arson or questionable insurance claims.



Edmund O'Brien



John Lund

Johnny narrated his adventures in flashback, detailing his adventures through the items on his expense report.

Actor Charles Russell (whose films included *The Purple Heart* [1944] and *The Late George Apley* [1947]) was the first to play Johnny Dollar when the show premiered over CBS Radio on February 11, 1949. Russell was not a particularly charismatic leading man, and was replaced in February of 1950 by future Academy Award-winner Edmund O'Brien (left). Ed had a solid resume in the film style known as noir, with prominent roles in such features as *White Heat* (1949) and *D.O.A.* (1950).

O'Brien filled out expense reports until November of 1952, when he handed off the role to John Lund (above). This actor was memorably described by Liz McLeod as “another leading-man type who was about fourteen minutes into his fifteen minutes of film stardom.” Lund’s cinematic work included *A Foreign Affair* (1948) and *The Mating Season* (1951)...but he was more effective in front of a microphone than in front of a movie camera. Lund starred on *Yours Truly, Johnny Dollar* until August of 1954, and he had the benefit of portraying Dollar during a period when the show had a sponsor (Wrigley’s Gum). For most of its broadcast history, *YTJD* was a sustaining series—meaning that cast and crew salary costs were shouldered by CBS, something that networks were loath to do. The Tiffany network didn’t do the series any favors by bouncing it around in time slot after time slot.

*Yours Truly, Johnny Dollar* went on a year-long hiatus until director-producer Jack Johnstone got an idea: why not resurrect the series as a serialized program, a quarter-hour to be broadcast five days a week? The new concept would allow Johnstone and other writers (like Les Crutchfield and Robert Ryf) leeway to make the stories more interesting and complex...not to mention infusing Johnny and the supporting cast of characters with layers of more nuanced characterization. An audition program in the new format was produced with Gerald Mohr playing Dollar...but then Johnstone was inspired to cast radio’s Bob Bailey in the title role.

There's no getting around it: Johnny Dollar was the radio role Robert Bainter Bailey was born to play. Bailey had a little luck in movies (with films like *The Eve of St. Mark* [1944] and *Wing and a Prayer* [1944]), yet he fared much better in the aural medium. If by some quirk of fate he hadn't landed the Dollar gig, he would be remembered for starring in *Let George Do It*, an underrated detective series broadcast mostly on the West Coast from 1946



Bob Bailey (seen here with movie co-star Vivian Blaine)

to 1954. Bailey's Johnny Dollar had a few similarities to his George Valentine character (both were world-weary with just a hint of idealism). Bob's Dollar was far more likable, however; he didn't take himself quite as seriously. Bailey's Johnny also possessed a drier, more playful sense of humor. Dollar was more than capable of holding his own in a scrap, though...and was downright tenacious when it came time to see a bumpy case through to the end.

*Yours Truly, Johnny Dollar* was broadcast in serialized stories between October 3, 1955 and November 2, 1956. For fans of the program, that portion of its run was unquestionably its best. When *YTJD* reverted back to its previous half-hour format, it lost the heftier plots and rich characterizations...but it still had Bailey. And the capable supporting cast included many of the greatest radio performers ever to haunt "Radio Row." Producer-director Johnstone would often recycle certain characters in his scripts. He created an eccentric named "Alvin Peabody Cartwright," who was memorably played by veteran actor Howard McNear. He also reunited Bob with his *Let George Do It* co-star Virginia Gregg, casting her as Johnny's love interest "Betty Lewis."

Calling *Yours Truly, Johnny Dollar* a half-hour program after November of 1956 is a bit generous. The show would eventually give five minutes of that time to newscasts, and another chunk of time whenever the show was fortunate enough to attract sponsors. Though the scripts slowly slipped into formula, the professionalism of Bob Bailey made the show better than it had a right to be. When CBS announced that production of *YTJD* was moving to New York in late 1960, Bailey elected to stay put in Hollywood to concentrate on a movie and TV career. Once on the East Coast, Johnny Dollar would be played by Robert Readick, followed by Mandel Kramer in June of 1961.

The consensus among old-time radio fans is that the “Radio’s Golden Age” ended on September 30, 1962—with Johnny Dollar filing his last expense report in “The Tip-Off Matter.” No one could have possibly predicted that “the man with the action packed expense account” would be the last man standing, but Bob Bailey’s Johnny Dollar remains astonishingly entertaining radio.

**The following broadcasts of *Yours Truly, Johnny Dollar* star Bob Bailey as “America’s fabulous freelance insurance investigator.” The series is directed and produced by Jack Johnstone, with scripts by Johnstone, Les Crutchfield, and Robert Ryf. Music supervision is by Amerigo Moreno and Carl Fortina.**

**CD 1: “The Jolly Roger Fraud Matter” (Parts 1 through 5) - March 19th – 23rd, 1956**

Pat McCracken at the Universal Adjustment Bureau needs our hero to go to San Diego. The sailing vessel “The Jolly Roger” has burned and sank...and the man previously investigating the incident has met his demise as well. Virginia Gregg, Forrest Lewis, Paul Frees, Jay Novello (below), Harry Bartell, Don Diamond, and Vic Perrin are heard in this adventure, along with announcer Roy Rowan.

**CD 2: “The Matter of the Medium, Well Done” (Parts 1 through 5) - May 14th – 18th, 1956**

Tommy Green of Mideastern Life has a client, heiress Carol Sharpe, who is carrying a \$110,000 life insurance policy. Carol has asked the company to change the policy’s beneficiaries...to a couple of questionable characters. Virginia Gregg co-stars in this serial, along with Lawrence Dobkin, Eleanor Audley, Lurene Tuttle, Harry Bartell, Herb Vigran, Junius Matthews, Tony Barrett, Sam Edwards, and Joseph Kearns. Roy Rowan is the announcer.



Jay Novello

**CD 3: “The Indestructible Mike Matter” (Parts 1 through 5) - June 4th – 8th, 1956**

Peter Branson at Lakeside Life and Casualty has insured the life of one Michael Jeremiah Flynn for \$50,000. Mr. Flynn is...to use the vernacular of the times...a bum. The untimely death of this Bowery rescue mission resident could very well result in a large payout to his unscrupulous beneficiary. Can Johnny convince

the unfortunate man of the danger he's in? Howard McNear and Alan Reed (right) are featured in this story, along with Roy Glenn, Lawrence Dobkin, Harry Bartell, Herb Vigran, and announcer Roy Rowan.



Howard McNear



Alan Reed

**CD 4: “The Laughing Matter” (Parts 1 through 5) - June 11th – 15th, 1956**

Ed Rensett of Union States Casualty assigns Johnny a trip to Ensenada to protect TV comic Charlie Burton (who's carrying \$500,000 worth of life insurance). Burton's producer is concerned because someone wants to kill his meal ticket...and it may be someone close. Virginia Gregg co-stars in this mystery, along with Lucille Meredith, Don Diamond, John Dehner, Harry Bartell, Lawrence Dobkin, and Gil Stratton. Roy Rowan is the announcer.

**CD 5: “The Primrose Matter” (Parts 1 through 5) - October 8th -12th, 1956**

Brad Taylor of Midstates Industrial asks Johnny to look into a Kansas City payroll heist. The armed-and-dangerous trio who masterminded the robbery has eluded the highway police and is on the run, with a tidy little sum of \$100,000 in the kitty. Marvin Miller, Junius Matthews, Herb Ellis, Dee J. Thompson, Herb Butterfield, Tony Barrett, and Barbara Eiler, are heard in these episodes, along with announcer Roy Rowan.

**CD 6A: “The Happy Family Matter” - December 15, 1957**

A dying man named Ellis P. Watkins is sent Johnny's way by Pat McCracken. Watkins has a policy worth \$100,000 to give away...and he wants Johnny to decide which of his three heirs is the most deserving beneficiary. Heard in this episode are John Dehner, Lawrence Dobkin, Paul Dubov, Virginia Gregg, Peter Leeds, and Shirley Mitchell.

**CD 6B: “The Eleven O’Clock Matter” - January 19, 1958**

Alfred Appleton of the ABC advertising agency has his life insured for \$100,000. It's an annuity—payable when Appleton turns 65—and Johnny is hired to ensure that the 55-year-old Alfred is around to collect after an attempt is made on his life. Ben Wright co-stars in this adventure, along with Will Wright, Harry Bartell, Eleanor Audley, Paula Winslowe, and Lawrence Dobkin. Dan Cubberly is the announcer.

### **CD 6C: “The Price of Fame Matter” - February 2, 1958**

Is that really Vincent Price for Johnny on the telephone? It is! Price is the victim of a \$100,000 theft, and Dollar’s hunt for the missing money leads him to Paris... where he encounters a sinister Peter Lorre-like figure in a seedy café. Vincent Price leads the cast of supporting players, which includes Virginia Gregg, Howard McNear, Junius Matthews, Forrest Lewis, Tony Barrett, and announcer Dan Cubberly.

### **CD 7A: “The Fatal Filet Matter” - May 10, 1959**

Ray Connelly of Continental Insurance invites Johnny over to the house for a steak dinner. Dollar is convinced that something’s bothering his friend, but by evening’s end, it won’t matter much...there was ground glass in Ray’s serving! Heard in this episode are Marvin Miller, Frank Gerstle, Dee J. Thompson, Virginia Gregg, Jack Edwards, Lawrence Dobkin, Harry Bartell, and announcer Dan Cubberly.

### **CD 7B: “The Larson Arson Matter” - November 8, 1959**

Harry Branson of Philadelphia Mutual Liability and Casualty comes clean to Johnny: the company sold a policy to former racketeer Bertie Larson. Larson has gained a lot of notoriety of late because he’s testified on TV before a committee holding hearings on narcotics/gambling...it’s the kind of assignment Dollar shouldn’t touch with a ten-foot pole! Virginia Gregg co-stars, along with Bert Holland, Don Diamond, and Harry Bartell. Dan Cubberly is the announcer.

### **CD 7C: “The Merry-Go-Round Matter” - January 31, 1960**

Alvin Peabody Cartwright returns! Johnny’s due for a handsomely fat fee when he’s assigned to investigate Cartwright’s latest acquisition of an art gallery... where a valuable jewel-encrusted icon has been stolen. Heard in the cast are Forrest Lewis, Frank Gerstle, Howard McNear, Joseph Kearns, Lawrence Dobkin, and Will Wright. John Wald is the announcer.

### **CD 8A: “The Collector’s Matter” - July 3, 1960**

Gun collector Orson Oglesby Terwilliger has taken out a life insurance policy with Floyd’s of England. The client wants to make some changes—upping the amount to \$500,000 with a double indemnity clause—and since Floyd’s George Reed is in the pokey on a speeding charge, he asks our hero to help him out. Virginia Gregg co-stars in this episode, along with G. Stanley Jones, Bartlett Robinson, Vic Perrin, and Forrest Lewis. John Wald is the announcer.

### **CD 8B: “The Back to the Back Matter”**

**- July 17, 1960**

An urgent phone call from Ed Barringer sends Johnny to New York, where he’s to protect advertising agency head Lucien R. Fletcher. Fletcher’s partner, William Spade, has vowed to murder him so that he can gain control of the agency! Heard in this story are Virginia Gregg, Frank Gerstle, Jack Edwards, Forrest Lewis, Jeanne Tatum (right), James McCallion, and Herb Vigran. John Wald is the announcer.



Jeanne Tatum

### **CD 8C: “The Too Much Money Matter”**

**- September 11, 1960**

One of George Reed’s most valuable clients, Alvin Peabody Cartwright, is staying with the equally important Rockland “Rocky” Rockwell...an experience that is making Alvin frantic with worry. G. Stanley Jones co-stars in this story, along with Howard McNear, Chester Stratton, Marvin Miller, and Sam Edwards. Hugh Douglas is the announcer.

### **CD 9A: “The Real Smokey Matter” - September 18, 1960**

Harry Branson has a bone to pick with Johnny. Dollar recommended that Philadelphia Mutual Liability and Casualty sell racketeer “Smokey” Sullivan a policy...and now Smokey is missing. Prepare the expense report! Heard in the cast are Harry Bartell, Stacy Harris, Lou Merrill, Vic Perrin, Tom Hanley, and Bill James. John Wald is the announcer.

### **CD 9B: “The Five Down Matter” - September 25, 1960**

Betty Lewis, Pat McCracken, George Reed, Alvin Peabody Cartwright, Harry Branson, and the rest of the *Johnny Dollar* regulars figure heavily in this offbeat outing that celebrates actor Bob Bailey’s fifth anniversary portraying “the man with the action packed expense account.” You’ll hear the voices of Virginia Gregg, Lawrence Dobkin, Forrest Lewis, Herb Vigran, Howard McNear, John Dehner, G. Stanley Jones, Vic Perrin, Harry Bartell, Marvin Miller, and announcer John Wald.

### **CD 9C: “The Stope of Death Matter” - October 2, 1960**

Hal Barker of Tri-Western Life joins Johnny in Virginia City, Nevada—a ghost town and the historic site of the Comstock Lode. A miner named Walter Bisbee has been killed in an accident, but Barker suspects that it may have been murder. Herschel Bernardi co-stars in this episode, along with Russell Thorson and Forrest Lewis. John Wald is the announcer.

**10A: “The Bad One Matter” - November 13, 1960**

Johnny meets with Culpepper Walker of Mono Guarantee. A juvenile delinquent who answers to “Pete McGuire” knows the identity of the man who killed Walker’s wealthy client...though Pete has personal reasons for remaining silent. Heard in the cast are Lawrence Dobkin, James McCallion, Forrest Lewis, Russell Thorson, and Sam Edwards. John Wald is the announcer.



Virginia Gregg



Paul Frees

**10B: “The Double Deal Matter” - November 20, 1960**

Dollar investigates one Michael Jonathan O’Bannion—known to his friends, non-friends, and associates as “Mickey the Hood.” The allegedly gone-straight Mickey has been loading up with insurance, and the company refuses to write him off until it can be proven that he’s a bad risk. Virginia Gregg and Paul Frees (above) co-star in this episode, along with Barney Phillips, Chester Stratton, and Harry Bartell.

**10C: “The Empty Threat Matter” - November 27, 1960**

Threats have been made against the life of a nervous client named Charles Starkerly, so Johnny must travel to Tahiti to retrieve him. Heard in this story are Ben Wright, Carleton Young, G. Stanley Jones, Harry Bartell, Ralph Moody, and Virginia Gregg. John Wald is the announcer.



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