

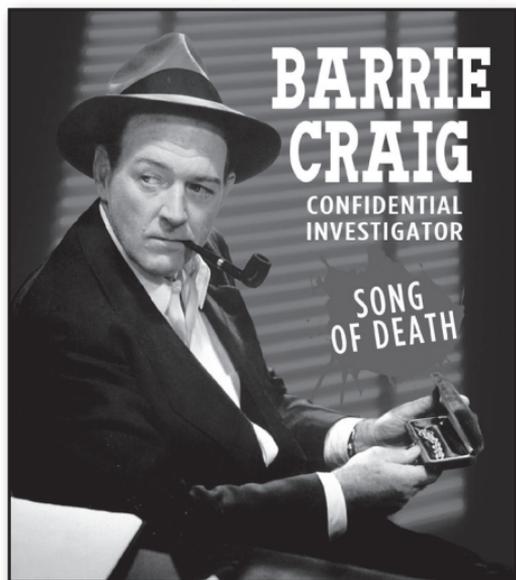
# BARRIE CRAIG, CONFIDENTIAL INVESTIGATOR

## Song of Death

Program Guide by Karl Shadow

The vast assortment of programs featuring private eyes during Radio's Golden Age adopted monikers that were considerably diverse. Some consisted solely of an individual's name (*Boston Blackie* and *Rocky Fortune*), while many added an inspirational modifier (*The Adventures of Philip Marlowe* and *The Amazing Nero Wolfe*). Still others wanted the audience to make a direct association between the protagonist and their vocation (*Richard Diamond, Private Detective* and *Jeff Regan, Investigator*). Once hired by a client, a licensed investigator would be obligated to keep the matter confidential. Indeed, the word 'confidential' (or 'confidentially') was utilized in a wide variety of series' titles. Examples of such programs include Arthur Hale's news commentaries, *Confidentially Yours*; a series of entertainer interviews by George Fisher, *Confidential Closeups*; and real-life dramas of a newspaperman, *Jack Lait: Confidential* (aka *Confidentially Yours*,

*Jack Lait*). One fictional private eye employed this more cultured nomenclature: *Barrie Craig, Confidential Investigator*.



This series, originating from New York, debuted on October 3, 1951 as a transcribed (pre-recorded) non-commercial entity under the title *Barry Crane, Confidential Investigator*. In the starring role was William Gargan, who had recently signed an exclusive five-year contract with NBC for both radio and television ventures. The package was



William Gargan

purportedly worth one million dollars. Gargan had an impressive resume, which included previous portrayals of similar characters on both the radio and small screen. As a member of the homicide squad, he was Inspector Burke in *Murder Will Out*. His performances as private detectives included Ross Dolan and Martin Kane. (The latter was enjoyed by the radio audience on Mutual, and by television viewers on network rival NBC.)

Appropriately, Gargan had early employment as a private investigator during the late 1920s in his native Brooklyn, New York. Soon thereafter, he was an actor on Broadway, moving to Hollywood in 1932 to take on careers in both radio and film. He was nominated for a Best Supporting Actor Oscar for *They Knew What They Wanted* (RKO Radio Pictures - 1940). Gargan's radio work in the 1930s included a stint as emcee of *Hollywood on the Air*, as well as guest appearances on Rudy Vallee's program. He was a regular member of the cast of *Good News of 1940*, and returned as an emcee of *G. I. Laffs* during the waning stages of World War II. In 1949, he sojourned to New York for the *Martin Kane, Private Eye* dual-medium enterprise noted above. Both versions of that project enjoyed success until early 1951, when Gargan became disillusioned with the live video series. According to the star, it had become far too sexist and was an embarrassment. His autobiography includes a terse communique to the show's producer: "Clean up the mess. Get decent scripts. Cut out the flesh parades. Or get another boy." Though he was part owner of the program, he did not have casting privileges and was subsequently canned. Lloyd Nolan was brought in as a replacement. Moreover, the Kane radio series was slated to move to NBC and - following his firing - Gargan was approached by Mutual executives about a new detective program. Those particular negotiations, however, did not result in a new project.

During the summer of 1951, Gargan had other plans. His agent at MCA, the legendary entertainment (and later, sports) icon Sonny Werblin, consummated the innovative Craig deal with NBC. Fortunately, the fallout from the Kane series was limited to an individual producer, and did not affect his relationship with the network.

Barrie Craig operated out of an office on Manhattan's Madison Avenue. Scripts for his initial episodes were written by George Lefferts, Frank Kane and Ernest Kinoy. The producer was Van Woodward, with direction by Edward King, and Fred Collins as the announcer. The initial airwaves adventure was received favorably by Bert Briller (*Variety*, October 12, 1951), although he referred to the title character as "Barry Crain." The reviewer stated: "...Gargan can be depended on to uphold the traditions of the freelance hawkshaw. 'Crain' won't disappoint the aficionados who like their sleuths in the tried-and-tested formula of cynical, tough-talking, hard-hitting (and often hard-hit) operatives." Of the overall production, Briller noted: "... plot devices plus fast-moving dialog and a sizable dose of slugging, got the ainer off to a suspenseful start and held interest throughout." He concluded: "Acting was topflight, with Gargan getting conviction into lines that are only in the world of radio mystery drama. Direction was good and music added nicely to the overall impact."

The series' theme was composed by Albert Buhman, with incidental music selected by Harold Venho of the NBC Music Library. As you listen to each of the episodes in this set, certain interludes may be recognizable from other radio programs. The lack of adequate budgets for radio in the 1950s necessitated the utilization of recorded music for the vast majority of dramatic programs.

As of the third episode ("The Judge and The Champ," October 17, 1951) the program was designated as *Barrie Craig, Confidential Investigator*. Along with the new appellation came announcer Don Pardo, whose sonorous voice would become well-known by fans of television's *The Price is Right*, *Jeopardy!* and *Saturday Night Live*. By the end of October, Himan Brown was brought in by NBC and Gargan (who was executive producer of the Craig enterprise) to produce and direct the series. Permanent writing duties were assigned on a relatively alternating basis to John Roeburt and Louis Vittes. (Both scribes had previously collaborated individually with Brown on *Inner Sanctum Mysteries*.) A former crime reporter for the *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Roeburt had also written a series of detective novels featuring cab driver J. Howard "Jigger" Moran. When he joined the Craig venture, Louis Vittes had recently completed his own series: *The Man from Homicide*. His extensive radio resume also included the various Nero Wolfe incarnations, *Mr. & Mrs. North* and *The Affairs of Peter Salem*, among many others.



Don Pardo

There were extensive efforts to engage a sponsor for the Gargan series, and on November 3, 1951 *The Billboard* reported that General Foods was set to sign on as an advertiser. However, only a few weeks later, the Pontiac Dealers agreed to take NBC up on an offer to bankroll a single episode of the program as a trial exercise. (This Craig adventure, “The Paper Bullets” [12/05/1951], was unique in that Barrie had to decide between two cases that were offered at the same time.) Following this test, the Pontiac Dealers choose not to sponsor additional episodes of the Madison Avenue investigator. Barrie continued to solve his cases as a sustainer until the Lewis-Howe Company became the first major underwriter of the series in March of 1952. With the sponsorship came a change in the schedule, and the Confidential Investigator moved to Tuesday nights at 8:30 pm -- a slot that was being vacated by the previous Lewis-Howe supported program *Tums Hollywood Theatre*. While most of the network had carried *Barrie Craig* at the usual Wednesday night slot since its inception the previous fall, listeners in certain regions were tuning in Barrie for the first time with the new Tuesday night offering. This included the audience of Cincinnati’s WLW (which had previously slated commercial programs instead). Magee Adams of the local *Enquirer* (March 17, 1952) made note of the adjustment: “A change from psychological thriller to “private eye” yarns.” In his subsequent critique of the series (*The Cincinnati Enquirer*, April 28, 1952), he acknowledged: “... throughout the show Craig worked closely with the police.” Adams continued: “Moreover, the show had none of the usual slumming flavor that leaves little to choose between the ‘private eye’ and underworld characters. On both counts, this is a thoroughly healthy change from the standardized ‘private eye’ show such as ‘the Falcon.’ In Barrie Craig it is more noteworthy because William Gargan’s previous tries as Ross Dolan and Martin Kane conformed to usual type.” His review concluded optimistically: “It could be that radio crime shows at last are moving the ‘private eye’ over to the right side of law enforcement.”

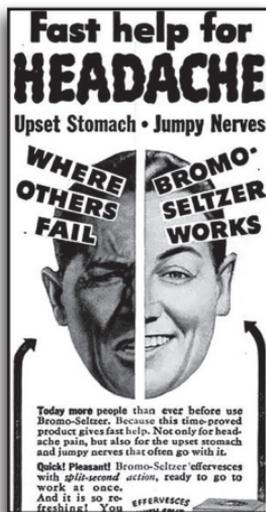
*Barrie Craig, Confidential Investigator* remained in the lucrative Tuesday night position through September 9, 1952, even though Lewis-Howe declined to renew its sponsorship after the first thirteen-week cycle was completed on June 10th. The gumshoe’s fans would have to tune in at the original Wednesday time as of September 24, 1952. This schedule lasted for only a few weeks (including the broadcast of October 15, 1952 “Dead Loss,” which is included in this collection). NBC developed a “Tandem Plan” for the fall, which proved to be quite beneficial for the network...and once again, the series found a sponsor. Emerson Drug Company, via its advertising agency Lennen & Mitchell, signed on for the Gargan enterprise. The first episode for the new benefactor aired on Sunday, October 19th at 10 pm EST. To meet the Tandem Plan requirements, the firm (promoting

its Bromo-Seltzer brand) would also bankroll Red Skelton and Judy Canova on Tuesday and Thursday nights, respectively. An additional participating sponsor was added to the plan when Smith Bros. (advancing its new mentholated cough drops) opted for a five week session beginning on November 9, 1952. Each week, the individual advertiser would rotate the position of their respective commercial announcements during the broadcast.

Throughout 1952, there were periodic notices in the trade that William Gargan was actively engaged in filming a pilot for a small screen version of Barrie Craig. Nevertheless, in September of that year, *TV-Radio Mirror* reported that he was not regularly appearing on television.

In March of 1953, a third bill-payer joined the Tandem Plan when the Emil Mogul ad agency convinced its client, Knomark Manufacturing Company, to enlist for a ten-week cycle. They used this period (March 15th - May 17th) to publicize one of the country's leading shoe-care products: Esquire Boot Polish. With the following week's installment, Emerson Drug completed its sponsorship of the series and once again the program reverted to sustaining status. As with the previous summer's schedule, Barrie Craig continued to be broadcast throughout the hot-weather months of 1953 with no hiatus. It was included in NBC's fall 1953 Tandem Plan, along with *The Six Shooter* and *The Eddie Cantor Show*. The Wichita-based appliance manufacturer Coleman Company enrolled in the campaign, beginning with the broadcast of Tuesday, September 15th. Fans would once again have to face the challenge of locating their favorite detective on a new day and time (8:30 pm). The Coleman Co. backing lasted a mere four weeks, with no additional advertisers opting to purchase the program through June of 1954.

However, during that time, the Craig enterprise was progressing with continued attempts at launching a video series. In the spring of 1954, *Daily Variety* (May 18, 1954) announced that a pilot had been filmed by Revue Productions at the



Barrie Craig sponsor Bromo-Seltzer



Barrie Craig sponsor Esquire Boot Polish

Republic Pictures studios. The thirty-minute drama was written by Fenton Earnshaw and directed by Blake Edwards. Anticipating that the television version would become a regular part of the fall lineup, production of the radio series was moved from New York to Hollywood. Himan Brown remained in New York, so the West Coast versions were directed by Arthur Jacobson and, later, Andrew Love. Both John Roeburt and Louis Vittes were retained as script writers. The full Hollywood cast was now acknowledged at the close of each broadcast. (This had not been the case for the New York originations.)

Upon its move to the West Coast, the airwaves version continued its Tuesday, 8:30 pm broadcasts before shifting, in October of 1954, to Sunday nights (also at 8:30 EST). The radio show continued as a 25-minute weekly session, with the finale airing on Thursday, June 30, 1955. A total of some 190 episodes comprised the canon, of which over one-quarter were of a commercial nature.

Even though *Barrie Craig, Confidential Investigator* never attained success on the small screen, William Gargan did achieve such a feat. He became a star once again in a familiar role on television in the Frederick Ziv/Harry Alan Towers 1957 syndicated series *The New Adventures of Martin Kane*. In 1960, Gargan was diagnosed with laryngeal cancer (from long-time smoking), which forced the removal of his vocal chords. He mastered the method of esophageal speech and became a spokesman for the American Cancer Society (ACS). It is rather surprising that in his 1969 autobiography, the Barrie Craig venture rates only a single paragraph. He would continue his work as an ACS advocate for another decade before succumbing to a heart attack in 1979. It is reassuring that in his *Daily Variety* (February 20, 1979) obituary, *Barry Craig, Confidential Investigator* was cited as an airwaves credit. At least this contribution to the radio noir genre was acknowledged by the trade paper press.

## **Episode Guide:**

### **CD 1A: “The Judge and the Champ” - 10/17/1951**

Supporting cast includes: James McCallion, Edwin Jerome, Santos Ortega, Joan Tompkins, Ken Lynch, Bernard Grant, Rita Lynn and Joe Boland.

### **CD 1B: “Microfilm in the Fish Tank” - 10/24/1951**

Supporting cast includes: Santos Ortega, Mandel Kramer, Bill Griffis, Martin Blaine, Joe DeSantis, Pat Hosley, Ken Lynch, George Petrie, Nat Polen and Peter Capell.

**CD 2A: “Corpse on Delivery” - 10/31/1951**

Supporting cast includes: Amzie Strickland (right), Ralph Bell and Robert Donnelly.



George Petrie and Amzie Strickland.

**CD 2B: “The Case of the Borrowed Knife” - 11/07/1951**

Supporting cast includes: Elspeth Eric, Ralph Bell, Santos Ortega, Parker Fennelly and Ken Lynch.

**CD 3A: “Dead on Arrival” - 11/14/1951**

Supporting cast includes: Arline Blackburn, Ralph Bell, Mandel Kramer and Parker Fennelly.

**CD 3B: “Murder in Wax” - 11/21/1951**

Supporting cast includes: Joan Alexander, Ralph Bell, Ethel Everett, Luis van Rooten, Gilbert Mack and Santos Ortega.

**CD 4A: “The Case of the Naughty Necklace” - 11/28/1951**

Supporting cast includes: Barbara Weeks, Ralph Bell, Gilbert Mack, Parker Fennelly and Luis van Rooten.

**CD 4B: “The Paper Bullets” - 12/05/1951**

Supporting cast includes: Barbara Weeks, Ralph Bell, Jackson Beck, Ian Martin and Luis van Rooten.

**CD 5A: “Death and the Purple Cow - 12/12/1951**

Supporting cast includes: Arline Blackburn, Ralph Bell, John Gibson, Santos Ortega, Mason Adams, Parker Fennelly, Jackson Beck and Peter Capell.

**CD 5B: “Song of Death” - 12/26/1951**

Supporting cast includes: Amzie Strickland, Ralph Bell, Mason Adams and Santos Ortega.

**CD 6A: “Murder By Threes” - 10/08/1952**

Supporting cast includes: Barbara Weeks, Ralph Bell, Everett Sloane and Santos Ortega.

**CD 6B: “Dead Loss” - 10/15/1952**

Supporting cast includes: Fran Carlon, Ralph Bell and Luis van Rooten.

**CD 7A: "Beware the Walking Dog" - 05/03/1953**

Supporting cast includes: Jane Webb, Ralph Bell and Parker Fennelly.

**CD 7B: "Screen for Murder" - 07/19/1953**

Supporting cast includes: Fran Carlon, Ralph Bell, George Petrie and Everett Sloane.

**CD 8A: "Kitchens Come With Knives" - 09/22/1953**

Supporting cast includes: Barbara Weeks, Ralph Bell and Everett Sloane.

**CD 8B: "Fog Over Murder" - 10/13/1953**

Supporting cast includes: Teri Keane, Larry Haines, Everett Sloane and Gilbert Mack.

**Additional sources:**

William Gargan (1969) *Why me? An Autobiography* by William Gargan

William Nadel (1998) "Radio Noir" (in *The Big Book of Noir*, L. Server et al. eds)

**Acknowledgements:** The author thanks Bryan Cornell and Rebecca Jones (Recorded Sound Research Center, Library of Congress) for their invaluable assistance.



Parker Fennelly is heard in "Beware the Walking Dog," and four more episodes in this collection.



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