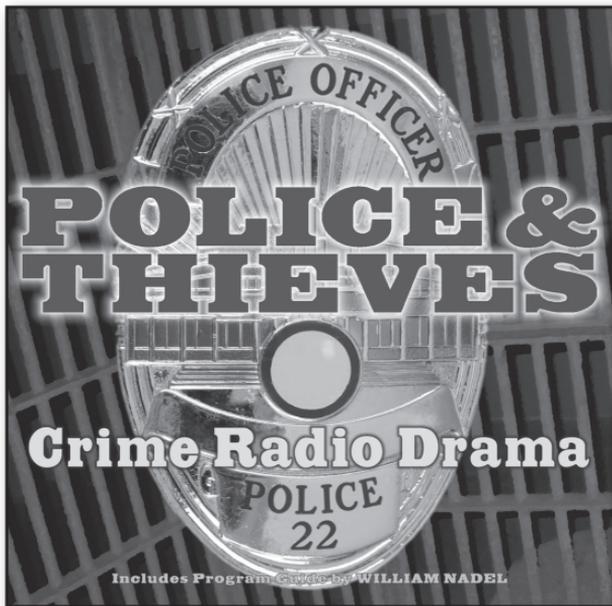


POLICE AND THIEVES

Crime Radio Drama

Program Guide by William Nadel

A police car speeds by, its siren wailing. Is it responding to a robbery, murder or some other horrendous crime? We have been tantalized by crime on the airwaves since the first radio shows attracted audiences in the early 1930's. We love following the work of the police, and their efforts to track down notorious crooks or murderers. For thirty years, radio presented hundreds of shows that portrayed the local police, government authorities, and those unofficial representatives who solved the strangest illegal puzzles.



Edith Meiser, the actress, writer, and producer who brought Sherlock Holmes to radio in 1930, was also proud of her efforts to bring one of the first true crime shows to the air -- *Twenty Thousand Years in Sing Sing*, which featured the tales of the prisoners in Sing Sing prison. (The number twenty thousand was the sum of the inmates' terms.) Edith would always comment that the public liked a good story told well in a dramatic way.

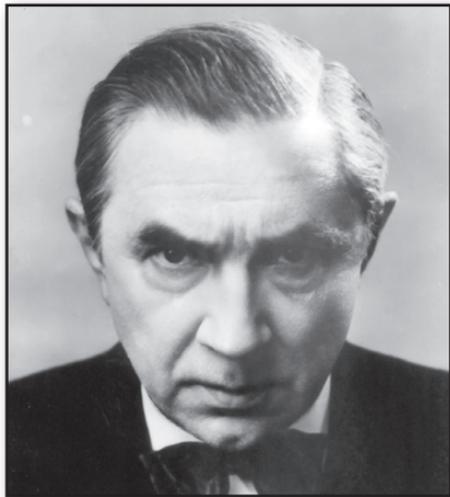
By the end of the 1940's, radio achieved its pinnacle as a dramatic medium. Not only did the airwaves of the 1950's present *fictionalized* crime, but

they also featured programs that boasted dramatizations of *actual* crimes as they were investigated by the authorities. Radio Spirits is proud to present twenty adventures from fifteen of the best (and most unusual) programs broadcast in the last dozen or so years of commercial network dramatic radio. As you listen, you may ponder the fact that many of today's television programs are modern equivalents of these classic efforts.

CD 1A: Broadway's My Beat: "The Stacy Parker Murder Case" by Morton Fine and David Friedkin - 07/05/52

Probably the most poetic of all police shows, *Broadway's My Beat* was a weekly word-picture tour of the best and worst of New York City's Theatre District. Conducting the tour of crime was Larry Thor as Lt. Danny Clover. His trusty assistants, Sergeants Tartaglia and Muggavan, were portrayed by Charles Calvert and Jack Kruschen. Kruschen would also "moonlight" as Dr. Sinsky.

In this case, Danny arrives at the apartment of Anna and Johnny Lynn to find Sgt. Muggavan and the dead body of jeweler Stacy Parker. Parker was attempting to collect a payment from the Lynn's, but the couple is nowhere to be found. Just where have the Lynn's gone? And, who shot Parker? Hy Averback is the troubled Lynn, with Edgar Barrier as the department store owner Wright in this weird "triangle". Bill Anders is the announcer.



Bela Lugosi

CD 1B: Broadway's My Beat: "The John Rand Murder Case" by Morton Fine and David Friedkin - 07/04/53

This time a hypochondriac has been poisoned. Has his nurse been too anxious to get her inheritance? Lt. Clover and his assistants follow the case, which stars Lurene Tuttle as Louise Rand and the megaphone voice, Herb Ellis as Tom, Irene Tedrow as Angela, and Truda Marson as Bonnie. (If you enjoy this lyrical murder, you might want to match wits with Danny in the cases found in Radio Spirits' *Broadway's My Beat* collections "Murder" and "Neon Shoals.")

CD 2A: Crime Does Not Pay: "Gasoline Cocktail" by Ira Marlon - 12/12/49

Based upon the very popular series of MGM

short subjects, *Crime Does Not Pay* originated from New York and featured movie stars in crime dramas. Horror icon Bela Lugosi (left), who stars as Nick Segadin, was a New York resident in the late 1940's, at one time living only blocks away from his frequent screen nemesis Boris Karloff. Heard as the elderly Mr. Segadin and as Fire Marshall Warren is Maurice Tarplin, with Bryna Raeburn as Sylvie in this incendiary exploit.

CD 2B: Crime On The Waterfront: "Audition Show" by J. T. Kelly - 02/24/49

At the very start of his broadcasting career, Mike (Myron) Wallace was a staff announcer and actor. Here, he is portraying Detective Lou Kagel of the New York police, assigned to solving crimes perpetrated on the waterfront (back when the Big Apple was one of the leading seaports in the United States). Wallace later achieved great fame as an interviewer and newscaster -- a tradition being carried on by his offspring. Muriel Bremner is Kagel's love interest in this saga, which finds Lou chaperoning a known racketeer.

CD 3A: Gang Busters: "The Case of the Inside Track" by Stanley Niss - 06/10/50

Probably the greatest of all shows dramatizing the activities of real-life crooks and murderers is *Gang Busters*, Phillips H. Lord's tribute to law enforcement officials. One of the unique aspects of the show was its descriptions of wanted fugitives at the end of each broadcast. When the shows were prepared for syndication in the 1970's, these descriptions were eliminated. The program has been immortalized in a commonly used expression that hints at the series' notoriously stirring opening sound effects: "coming on like Gangbusters."

In this case, Barbara Weeks (right) portrays Ellie, an undercover cop trying to investigate a narcotics ring. Also featured are Wendell Holmes as Hutch, Ralph Bell as Ginger, George Petrie as Sampson and Roger Forster as the announcer.



Barbara Weeks

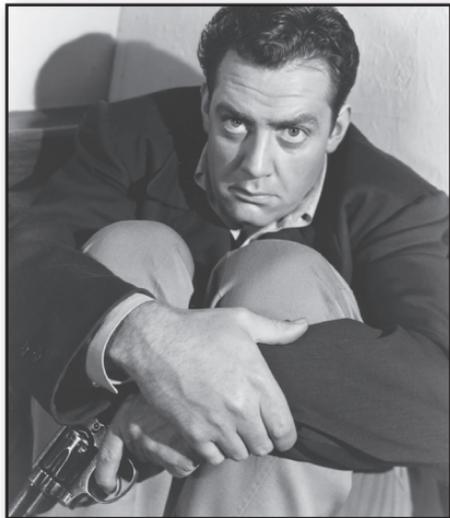
CD 3B: *Gang Busters*: “The Case of the Temperate Thief” by Stanley Niss - 09/30/50

One of the most tragic of all the true stories retold on *Gang Busters* is the tale of George Harris, a former criminal trying to “go straight” as the owner of a dry cleaning shop in Manhattan’s Yorkville area. Unfortunately, George has a very demanding wife. Ralph Bell and Elspeth Eric are the unhappy Harrises, with Bryna Raeburn as Mamma, Larry Haines as Sonny, and George Petrie as Lt. Noonan. Roger Forster announces this New York City fable.

(Author’s Note: I can remember listening to *Gang Busters* on the radio in the 1950’s, watching it on television, and then being truly surprised when it also turned up at my local movie theater as the second feature on a double bill. I was thrilled to see actor Myron Healy cavort on the screen as his character tried to evade the authorities.)

CD 4A: *The Line-Up*: “The Mad Bomber Case” by Blake Edwards - 01/11/51

Set in an unnamed city (later revealed to be San Francisco), *The Line-Up* began and ended each episode with prisoners in a precinct station being viewed by crime victims. In charge of the proceedings was Lt. Ben Guthrie, superbly played by Bill Johnstone. Calling the line-up was Wally Maher, in his role as Sgt. Matt Greb. The listener is then treated to hearing the West Coast’s best actors step forward as vagrants, murderers, pickpockets, perverts, thieves, and muggers. Then, the action of the adventure begins.



Raymond Burr

In this episode, George Hunter, a local politician, has had his house bombed by an unknown assailant. John McIntire is Hunter, Clayton Post is Officer Quine and Bert, Sidney Miller is Phillips and John, Ed Begley is Crump and Louis Macy, Joe Du Val is Officer Harrison and Ivan, Raymond Burr (left) is the Chief, and Howard McNear is Black and a policeman. Dan Cumberly is the announcer.

CD 4B: *The Line-Up*: “The Lapinish Lighter-Upper Case” (a.k.a. “The Elsner Case”) by Gene Levitt and Bob Mitchell - 03/27/51

This oft repeated case of a woman murdered in a public park was a highlight of *The Line-Up*.

Ted Osborne guests as Leonard Elsnor and Charles Ulster, Gil Stratton is Sidney, Parley Baer is Maurice and Beck, Herb Butterfield is Jimmy Vetter and Wallerman, Robert Griffin is Tommy and Harrison, and Virginia Gregg is Mrs. Elsnor and the landlady. For Gregg, performing in this show was a “family affair,” as she was the wife of producer/director Jaime del Valle. Like *Gang Busters*, *The Line-Up* made it to both television and the movies.

CD 5A: The Man From Homicide: “Don Shelberger Murder” by Lou Vittes - 07/09/51

Dan Duryea made a career out of playing sleazy characters and murderers on the big and small screens. Yet, on radio he played Lt. Lou Dana, The Man From Homicide, whose motto was “I don’t like killers!”

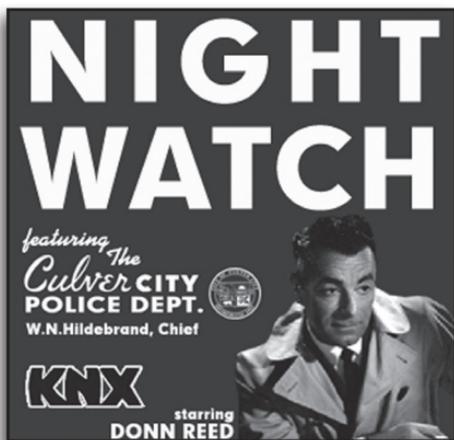
In this episode, a dead boy is found in an alley. His throat has been slashed. Lt. Dana has been assigned to investigate, and to inform the dead boy’s sister. The boy, only 18, was a junkie...but, what was the motive for the crime? Larry Dobkin is heard as Dave and Frank, Jeanne Bates as Gloria, Bill Bouchey as McPherson, and Joe Forte as Needle Nose Rackley. The show is announced by Lou Cook.

CD 5B: The Man From Homicide: “Old Man Kelso” by Dick Powell (the writer, not the actor) - 07/16/51

Franklin Kelso is a wealthy old man worth ten million dollars. He has a young wife, Vivian, whose brother has threatened Franklin. Lt. Dana is given the job of protecting Kelso, until -- you guessed it -- the old man is murdered. Is the murderer Vivian (played by Jo Gilbert), brother-in-law Farley (played by Barney Phillips), or business manager Elliott (played by Tony Barrett)? Herb Butterfield stars as Kelso, with Bill Bouchey as Inspector Sherman, and Orville Anderson is the announcer.

CD 6A: Night Watch: “Glass Breaker” - 05/03/54

The invention of the portable tape recorder allowed on-the-spot recordings to be made much easier than they could with the use of disk recorders. It wasn’t long before the Culver City, California Police Department authorized a radio



program presenting recordings of actual police investigating crimes. Ride with Sgt. Ron Perkins and Detective Matlock as they speed to a gas station that is being robbed, and hear the suspect talking to the police. Police Reporter Don Reid arrives at headquarters to follow the questioning of the gas station thief, as well as the comments made by his mother and brother. Everything heard in the recording is what actually went on. The closing summation is made by Police Chief Hildebrand.

CD 6B: Night Watch: “Hammer 211” - 07/10/54

A liquor store has been held up. Sgt. Perkins and Sgt. Good arrive on the scene, interview the clerk, and follow up on the search for the suspect. Then, a dry cleaner asks the police to investigate marijuana found in a customer’s jacket. Listen to how the police handled crime in 1954.

CD 7A: Official Detective: “Butcher Shop Murder” by Albert G. Miller - 02/23/56

Another of the many police shows from the 1950’s, *Official Detective* was produced and directed by Winn Wright. A butcher shop is held up, and when a customer intervenes, he is murdered. Jack Irish announces, with Craig McDonald playing the leading role of Lt. Dan Britt, Lawson Zerbe as Sgt. Allen, Don Douglas as Earl Ryan, and Betty Kane as Mrs. Foster and Mrs. Leslie. The most interesting member of this cast is Louis Nye, who doubles as Kraus and Sailor Smith. Nye, a familiar face on the Steve Allen television show, would soon have his own CBS radio program. He went on to modest fame as a comedian with the memorable line, “Here’s Nye in your eye!”



Elizabeth Short

CD 7B: Police Blotter: “Homicide by Hurricane” by Sheldon Stark - 1956

Bill Zuckert, one of the great character actors of radio, was usually cast in supporting roles on most shows. In the mid-1950’s, he was finally chosen to play a leading role. He was cast as Sgt. Brad Peters on *Police Blotter*, a program that is best remembered as one of the rotating shows that made up ABC’s nightly anthology series *Mystery Time*. In this installment, an inventor is found dead in an airport’s experimental wind tunnel. Supporting Zuckert are Joseph Bolen as Harry Dennis, Elaine Rost as Helen Costa, and Carl Frank as William Jefferson.

CD 8A: Somebody Knows: “The Black Dahlia” by Sidney Marshall- 08/24/50

It was a unique idea: CBS offered a \$5,000 reward for witnesses or informers willing to reveal the solution to an unsolved crime. Perhaps the most famous unsolved murder of the 1940’s was the death and mutilation of Elizabeth Short. Dramatized in this program are the efforts of the Los Angeles police to find Short’s murderer...and their lack of success. Frank Gross announces this episode, which features Jack Johnstone as the narrator, Barney Phillips as Robert Hyman and the police monitor voice, William Conrad as Captain Donohue, Harry Bartell as the corporal, and Tony Barrett as various men’s voices.

CD 8B: Squad Room: “Body Found in a Plastic Bag” by Peter Irving - 1955

One of my favorite shows of the 1950’s was *Squad Room*. I especially liked its plots and sound effects. This rare surviving example of the series deals with the caretaker of a reservoir, his disgruntled wife, and a body that he retrieves from the water. Producer Winn Wright stars as Lt. John Douglas, Dan Ocko is Sgt. Herb Allen, Eric Dressler is Reefer Collie and Chris Wilson, and Bryna Raeburn is Mrs. Stern and Mrs. Collie.

CD 9A: Treasury Agent: “The Case of the Faithful Wife” - 08/11/47

Money may make the world go round, but “funny money” is no joke. When counterfeit bills are found, or suspected, it becomes the domain of the Treasury Department. One of the most active fictional agents in this Phillips H. Lord radio series was Joe Lincoln, portrayed by Raymond Edward Johnson. In this exploit, Eva Smith, the former wife of a counterfeiter, goes to great lengths to hide the forged plates that once belonging to her ex-husband. Things get crazy when Eva’s ex escapes from prison. Chuck Webster stars as Lou Smith, with Arthur Vinton as the judge, Ralph Bell as Al Williams and the guard, and Barry Thomson as Maury Hutton.

CD 9B: Twenty-First Precinct: “Abandoned Baby” - 06/28/56

Manhattan’s Upper East Side was the setting for one of the last great programs of radio’s golden age. Fictionally populating the local police precinct were James Gregory as Captain Cronin, Harold Stone as Sgt. Waters, and Santos Ortega as Lt. Gorman.

In this episode, Harry Froude has a problem. His wife has taken in a baby that is not theirs...so, he brings his predicament to the precinct. Harry and his wife Cora are played by Mandel Kramer and Elspeth Eric, with Ralph Camargo as Mercado, George Petrie as Officer Eisman and the station booth man, and Bill Quinn as another officer.

CD 10A: Under Arrest: “Mrs. Mollison’s Handbag” by Paul R. Milton - 05/08/49

Before he was a familiar face on television, Joe De Santis had his own radio show. As Captain Jim Scott, he would investigate some of the most slippery of criminals. This time, Scott investigates a case involving a plan to open a luggage store at an airport, and an elaborate “badger game” to be played on an unsuspecting airport official. Rita Lynn stars as the unforgettable Mrs. Mollison, with Eric Dressler as her husband, and Court Benson as the gullible Dave Hale. Rita also doubles as the operator, and Ken Marvin announces this nearly forgotten gem of radio.

CD 10B: Unit 99: “First Call - Attempted Suicide” - 11/01/57

We close our survey of radio’s greatest crime shows with another on-the-spot true crime program. This time we ride with Sgt. Dan Meredith. Listen in now to Police Chief James B. Hicks and Officers Lopez, Stargill, and York as they investigate the crimes of an attempted suicide, an irresponsible grandmother, and a prowler.

Final Thoughts

Although new crime drama has essentially disappeared from the commercial radio airwaves, it does continue to flourish on television. Scores of police and crime shows make up a substantial portion of the weekly broadcast schedule, and our appetite for these programs goes unabated. To paraphrase a comment once made by actor Bela Lugosi – crime never dies!



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