

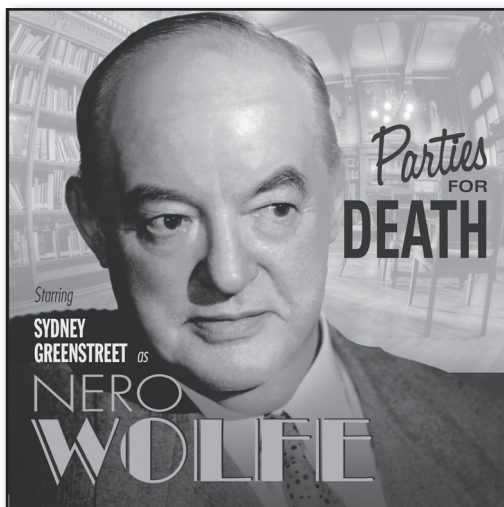
# THE NEW ADVENTURES OF NERO WOLFE

## Parties for Death

Program Guide by William Nadel

Rex Stout was always critical of the actors who portrayed his orchid-loving super sleuth Nero Wolfe on the screen and on the airwaves -- with one exception. Stout thought that the British-American Sydney Greenstreet came the closest to his idea of the character who lived in a New York City town house on West 35th Street.

Shortly after he completed a stint on Broadway at the end of 1940, Sydney Greenstreet packed up his belongings and left his apartment in the Lucania on West 71st street in Manhattan to make his way to a new career as a movie actor in Hollywood. It was a big change for the British-born actor who had been on stage in both England and America for thirty-five years. A long-time New Yorker, Greenstreet knew well the environs in and around the theater district, and the residence of Nero Wolfe.



Arriving in Hollywood at the age of 61, Greenstreet went on to appear in 24 films, many of which are revered as screen classics. The rotund actor even entered the world of detection as a retired Scotland Yard inspector in *The Verdict*, a film version of Israel Zangwell's classic *The Big Bow Mystery*. Throughout the 1940's he also made many guest appearances on radio.



Sydney Greenstreet

By 1950, the portly actor wanted to have a radio series of his own and was eyeing a project tentatively titled *The Key*. Ultimately, Greenstreet would be cast as the over-weight, reclusive, New York detective Nero Wolfe. Four years earlier, the actor had turned down the chance to portray Dashiell Hammett's "The Fat Man," but now, with his film career just about over, he would play Rex Stout's armchair gumshoe.

NBC described Wolfe as "a gourmet who never walks when he can sit and never sits when he can lie down, whose passion is his orchid conservatory." The network also noted that Wolfe "hates to leave his comfortable home and accepts cases that intrigue him and for which he can collect exorbitant fees." Wolfe employs Archie Goodwin as his secretary and operative. Archie follows up on leads and does the leg work for his supremely intelligent boss. Packaged by Edwin Fadiman, the series was directed and produced by J. Donald Wilson and featured Bill Johnstone in a continuing role as Inspector Cramer of the New York police.

### **The Case of the Six Archies**

Over the years, many have wondered why six actors were selected to portray Archie Goodwin in the twenty-six episodes of the series. There seemed to be no clear reason, except that Sydney Greenstreet was "difficult." Here's my belief about the problem: by the time Greenstreet started playing Wolfe he had been an actor for almost half a century. If anyone knew about acting, Sydney did. However, the actor was severely overweight (280 pounds), and was suffering from kidney problems and diabetes. He was also plagued by the other infirmities of old age. Remember, he was the star of the program. Yet, on episode after episode, the actor portraying Archie overshadowed the Broadway great.

This would not sit well with any actor playing the lead in a series, and it probably infuriated Greenstreet. So, Wally Maher, Lamont Johnson, Herb Ellis, Larry Dobkin, and Gerald Mohr all had to go. The rumors about the problems on the show appear to have doomed the chances for sponsorship of the series.

This is what Harry Bartell stepped into when he accepted the role of Archie. Greenstreet began to feel that Bartell was deferential to him, and the two jelled as a team -- but it was too late, and regrettably the show was cancelled. The series was wonderful radio, and all but one episode survives. The remaining eight shows not heard in this collection are featured in the Radio Spirits companion set *The New Adventures of Nero Wolfe: The Case of the Midnight Ride and Other Tales*.



Harry Bartell

### **Episode Listing**

#### **CD 1A: “Stamped for Murder” by Alfred Bester - 10/20/50**

A distressed Gloria consults Wolfe about a phony treasure map purchased by her father for \$10,000. The map seems to have been fabricated using letters owned by a Mr. Rodman. Is this all a big con game?

Wally Maher is Archie in this the first of *The New Adventures of Nero Wolfe* aired Friday nights at 8 pm (8:30 pm on the West Coast). Larry Dobkin is Halleck, Jay Novello is Sanford, Jeanne Bates is Gloria, Howard McNear is Rodman, and Herb Vigran is Cross in this episode that features Joseph Enos at the organ.

#### **CD 1B: “The Case of the Dear Dead Lady” by Peter Barry - 11/03/50**

Ted Oliphant is worried about his girlfriend Lisa Dana. Her other beau, Jack Hunter has threatened her life. A third man, Basto Young, is also concerned about Lisa. Can Wolfe discern her real killer?

Bob Packam’s orchestra provides the musical bridges and themes for this and all remaining adventures in the series. Herb Ellis is Archie, with Myra Kennelly as Lisa, Larry Dobkin as Young and the pawnbroker, Jerry Hausner as Housebreaker and the elevator operator, Lee Millar is Oliphant, and Barney Phillips is Hunter in this “boyfriend riddle.” This episode was not aired in New York. Instead, the listeners heard a political program about the candidates vying for office in the upcoming election.

#### **CD 2A: “The Case of the Careless Cleaner” by Shirl Hendryx - 11/17/50**

A cleaning woman is found murdered with a Chinese letter-opener belonging to



Dan O'Herlihy

Clay, a painter. Wolfe owns one of this artist's paintings – so, as an art-lover, it is his duty to investigate.

Larry Dobkin is Archie in this picture-perfect case. Along for the ride are Betty Lou Gerson as Phila, Vic Perrin as Clay, Howard McNear as Garrison and the club owner, and Dan O'Herlihy (left) as Lou.

### **CD 2B: “The Case of the Beautiful Archer” by Peter Barry - 11/24/50**

A sculptor's daughter will do anything to see the man that she loves, a patient in Townley's Sanitarium who is trying to forget her. Diana, however, is not a woman who is easily forgotten.

Larry Dobkin is Archie in this saga of love gone wrong, with Ted Von Eltz as Dr. Townley, Jay Novello as Michael, GeGe Pearson as Diana and the operator, and Peter Leeds as Willard and Haines.

### **CD 3A: “The Case of the Brave Rabbit” - 12/01/50**

A governor's crime committee is closing in on Veek, a notorious boss of gambling in New York. Just how is he obtaining his inside information? And, how does a rabbit farm relate to gambling? And, what brings Wolfe out to the farm?

Larry Dobkin is Archie in this strange tale also known as “The Case of the Friendly Rabbit.” Hal Gerard is Veek, Martha Shaw is Claire, Herb Butterfield is the Governor, Howard McNear is Williams and Marshall, and Bill Johnstone is Haines in this “lepus” yarn.

### **CD 3B: “The Case of the Slaughtered Santas” - 12/22/50**

Street corner Santas are being killed. A terrified Santa consults the gourmet detective, fearful that he will be the next Saint Nick to be murdered.

Larry Dobkin is Archie in this unique holiday drama. Howard McNear is an officer and reporter # 1, Jeanne Bates is Laura, Herb Butterfield is John, Bill Johnstone is Santa # 1, Vic Rodman is Mike, Santa # 2 and the bum, Bob Bruce is Wayne, and Grace Lennard is Peg.

**CD 4A: “The Case of the Calculated Risk” by Charles O’Neill - 01/19/51**

Dave says that he will kill the man who implicated him in a murder, but Dave needs Wolfe’s help to see that justice is done.

Gerald Mohr (below) is Archie, Lorraine Carter is Helen, Bill Johnstone is Dave, Howard McNear is Tesrow and Man # 1, Herb Butterfield is McClain and Carl, Vic Rodman is Tinsley and Mitch in this convoluted tale of revenge.

**CD 4B: “The Case of the Phantom Fingers” - 01/26/51**

While on a trip upstate to see some rare orchids, Wolfe and Archie are stranded by a storm in a house with strange occupants...and murder.

Gerald Mohr is Archie, with Howard McNear as Lewis, Tim Graham as James and the Tramp, Eddie Fields as Sam, and GeGe Pearson as Peg in this “wolfian” escapade into the world of “old dark house” mysteries.

**CD 5A: “The Case of the Vanishing Shells” - 02/02/51**

Archie has a passion for redheads. So, when Doris, a redhead, calls Wolfe to say that she is in danger, Archie runs to investigate.

Gerald Mohr is Archie, with Vic Perrin as Rick, Jeanne Bates as Doris, Betty Lou Gerson as Paula, Peter Leeds as David, and Bill Johnstone as Stoner in this colorful exploit.

**CD 5B: “The Party for Death” by Mindret Lord - 02/16/51**

There’s a cocktail party at the Collins’ home. The atmosphere is charged, and the drinks’ll kill you...as Archie finds out.

Harry Bartell mingles as Archie, while GeGe Pearson entices as Georgia, Evelyn Eaton hosts as Janie, and Peter Leeds and Herb Butterfield whisper as Joe and Albert.

**CD 6A: “The Case of the Malevolent Medic” by Ruth Adams Knight - 02/23/51**

Mrs. Horton dies suddenly in her doctor’s office. Did the good doctor



Gerald Mohr

or his nurse commit murder to eliminate a “problem” affecting their upcoming marriage?

Harry Bartell is Archie, Mary Lansing is Grace, Vic Perrin is Dr. Sloan, and Bruce Paine is Hal Horton in this “prescription for murder.”

**CD 6B: “The Case of the Hasty Will” by John Edison - 03/02/51**

John Blake has an unusual request. He wants Wolfe and Archie to witness the signing of his will -- yet, Blake is a very influential businessman. What has Blake to hide from those who work for him?

Harry Bartell is Archie, Vic Rodman is Blake, Louise Arthur is Anita, and Hal Gerard is Wilbur in this “will-full” puzzle.

**CD 7A: “The Case of the Final Page” by Don Arthur - 03/23/51**

When Wolfe and Archie show up for a meal at a friend’s apartment, they find him dead...and, then the catered dinner arrives.

Harry Bartell is Archie, Evelyn Eaton (below) operates the elevator, Peter Leeds caters and is Henry Childs, and Lucille Alix is Cynthia. Herb Butterfield is Morton, with Monica Neely as his secretary.

**CD 7B: “The Case of the Tell-Tale Ribbon” by John Edison - 03/30/51**

A letter with \$500 brings Archie to the Millott estate. No one there seems to know anything about the note, yet murder is in the air.



Evelyn Eaton, seen here with Dennis Hopper from the television program *Medic*.

Harry Bartell is the puzzled Archie in this “just where is the party” adventure. Irene Winston is Dorothy, Jeanne Bates is Eva and Jeffries, Ted Von Eltz is Millott, Jerry Hausner is Larry, and Vic Rodman is Jenkins and Dr. Hauser.

**CD 8A: “A Slight Case of Perjury” by Gladys Williams - 04/06/51**

A murder suspect acquitted by false testimony desperately needs Wolfe’s help. Scriptwriter Williams originally called this strange drama “The Case of the Shot in the Dark.”

Harry Bartell is Archie, Jeanne Bates is Patricia, Mary Lansing is Marge, Paul Marion is Wilcox, Barney Phillips (right) is Brad, and Ken Peters is Don in this tale of lies and cover-up.

**CD 8B: “The Case of the Lost Heir” by Mindret Lord - 04/20/51**

Horace Crail’s long lost daughter has surfaced. Supposedly killed in a plane crash, is she really the daughter of the millionaire, or is she a fortune hunter trying to fool an old blind man?

Martha Shaw is a very convincing Magda, Peter Leeds is the devoted Hugh, Gray Stafford is Anthony, Vie Rodman is the elderly Horace, and Bill Johnstone is the butler in this peculiar game of “Blind Man’s Bluff.”



Barney Phillips

**CD 9A: “The Case of Room 304” by Virgil Reimer - 04/27/51**

A foreign woman, in America to buy technical equipment, is shot. The circumstances of her death are puzzling. Did she commit suicide, or is it murder?

Lucille Alix is the doomed Helen, with Hal Gerard as Jay, Val Brown as Morio and Joe, Betty Lou Gerson as Jean, Vic Rodman as Renfrew, and Ed Bailey as Mac in this last Nero Wolfe episode (which I like to call “Nero Wolfe meets Mr. Wong and Charlie Chan”). By 1951, the Monogram-produced Mr. Wong and Charlie Chan films had reached television. Clearly, this script is a retelling of the plot of “Mr. Wong in Chinatown,” or its remake “The Chinese Ring” (with Roland Winters in his first Charlie Chan role).

**A Final Look at Sydney ... and Peter Lorre**

Following the cancellation of the program, Sydney Greenstreet retired from acting. His many fans remember (and love) his enduring screen appearances, and his teaming with Peter Lorre in a third of them. As a salute to Greenstreet and his frequent co-star, Radio Spirits presents the *Screen Guild Theatre* version of their classic 1944 film *The Mask of Dimitrios*.

**CD 9B: *The Lady Esther Screen Guild Theatre* "The Mask of Demetrios" - 04/16/45**

Intrigued by the unusual death of a notorious underworld character, Professor Leydon decides to research the crook's criminal past for a possible book...and crosses path with the strange Mr. Peters.

Sydney Greenstreet is Peters, Peter Lorre is Leydon, and Lou Merrill is the morgue attendant and the mysterious Demetrios in this tour-de-force.



Peter Lorre with Sydney Greenstreet



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